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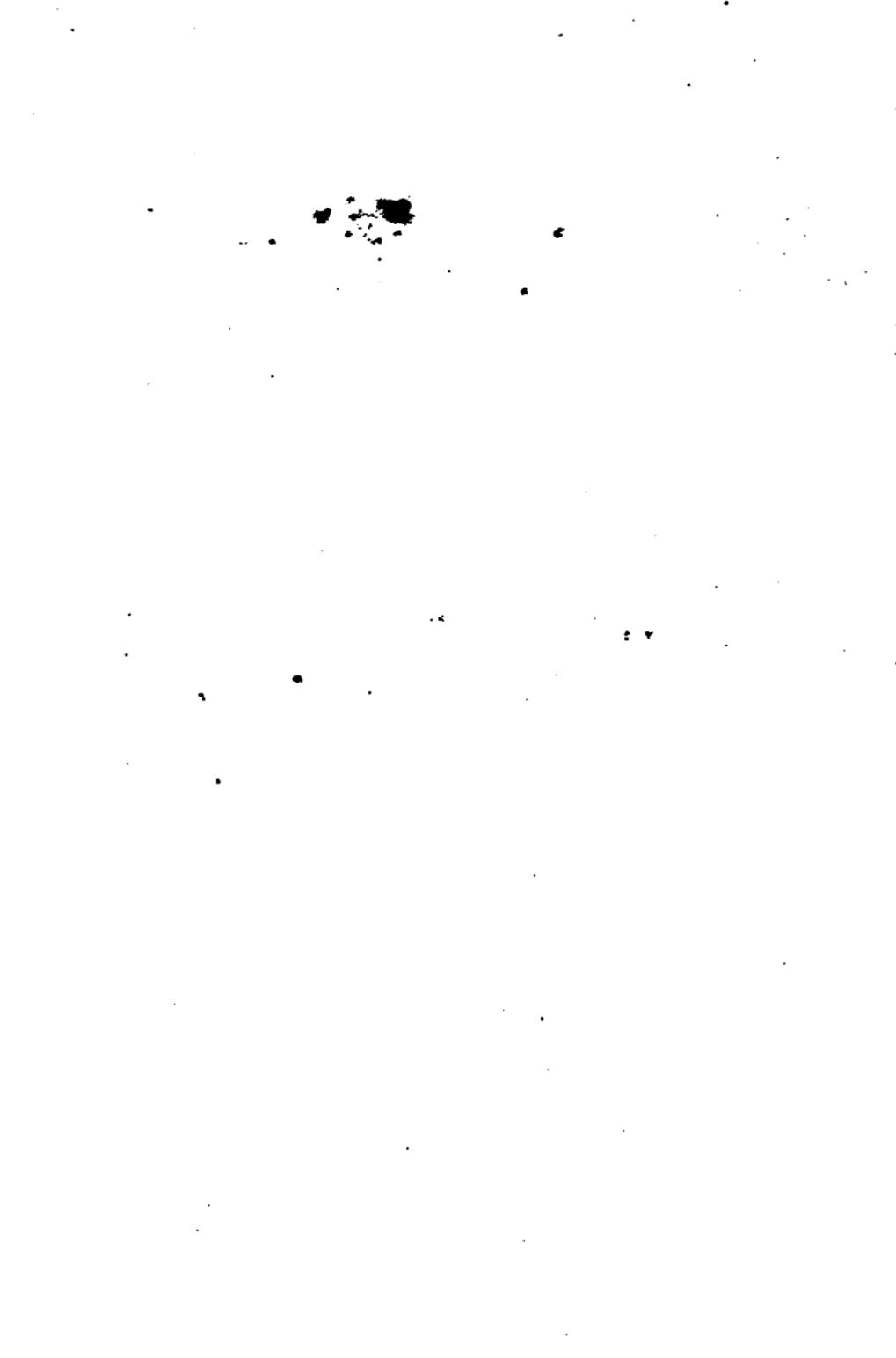
IN MEMORY OF JAMES JACKSON LOWELL

FIRST SCHOLAR OF THE CLASS
OF 1858 * LEFT THE LAW
SCHOOL AT THE OUTBREAK
OF THE CIVIL WAR TO JOIN
THE 20TH MASSACHUSETTS
VOLUNTEER INFANTRY
MORTALLY WOUNDED AT
THE BATTLE OF GLENDALE
JULY 30TH 1862



FROM THE GIFT OF HIS SISTER
HARRIET LOWELL PUTNAM
M-CM-XVII





INVESTING UNCLE BEN'S LEGACY.

A TALE OF

MINING AND MATRIMONIAL SPECULATIONS

BY

OLD BOOMERANG

George Robertson

MELBOURNE, SYDNEY, AND ADELAIDE

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TO THE

HON. JOHN FAIRFAX, M.L.C.,

S Y D N E Y,

A KIND AND STEADFAST HELPER TO THE PIONEERS

OF AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE, AND A TRUE

FRIEND TO EVERY GOOD CAUSE,

This Volume is Respectfully Inscribed,

BY

THE AUTHOR.



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
A FAILURE IN MELBOURNE AND A FRESH START IN SYDNEY	I

CHAPTER II.

MR. M'TAILING MAKES A NICE LITTLE SPEC IN GOLD TO BEGIN WITH	10
---	----

CHAPTER III.

MR. M'TAILING GOES INTO COPPER	20
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE NORTHERN BULLSEYE COPPER COMPANY IS FLOATED	28
--	----

CHAPTER V.

MR. M'TAILING GOES INTO THE BILLYBLOWER CRUSH- ING COMPANY	36
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

	PAGE
MR. M'TAILING GOES INTO SOMETHING EXTRA RICH IN GOLD	46

CHAPTER VII.

MARTIN ASSISTS MRS. CARNEY TO INVEST HER LITTLE CAPITAL	54
--	----

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. M'TAILING GOES LARGELY INTO TIN	64
-------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IX.

MARTIN CANNOT BUY INTO THE VICTORIAN TWANKAY CRUSHING COMPANY	74
--	----

CHAPTER X.

A RISE IN PEAK DOWNS. MARTIN'S LANDLADY SHOWS EXTREME GRATITUDE	82
--	----

CHAPTER XI.

MR. M'TAILING RESOLVES TO GET MARRIED	92
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XII.

MARTIN SPENDS A WEEK IN HIS FRIEND FAGWELL'S HOME	101
--	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

MARTIN BUYS TWO SHARES IN THE ETNA GOLD COM- PANY FOR HIS SISTER	110
---	-----

CONTENTS.

vii

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. CARNEY "NAMES THE DAY"	PAGE 118
-----------------------------	-------------

CHAPTER XV.

MR. M'TAILING GOES HEAVILY INTO PEAK DOWNS COPPER SHARES	126
---	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

FEROCIOUS OBJECTIONS OF MRS. CARNEY'S FAMILY TO HER UNION WITH MARTIN	136
--	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE FIERCE OBJECTORS TO MARTIN'S MARRIAGE	144
--	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

RATHER SENSATIONAL	154
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEGINNING OF A PANIC IN THE MINING SHARE MARKET	164
--	-----

CHAPTER XX.

"DOMESTIC HAPPINESS ! THOU ONLY BLISS, OF PARADISE THAT HAS SURVIVED THE FALL"	173
---	-----

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. DRENCH'S REFLECTIONS ON THE MINING PANIC	181
--	-----

CHAPTER XXII.

	PAGE
A FRIEND IN NEED - - - - -	190

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOME MORE EXCITING NEWS FOR MARTIN - - - - -	198
--	-----

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. BLOUGH RESOLVES TO GO TO LAW WITH THE PROMOTERS OF 29 DEFUNCT MINING COMPANIES - - - - -	207
--	-----

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION - - - - -	217
----------------------	-----



INVESTING UNCLE BEN'S LEGACY

A TALE OF
MINING AND MATRIMONIAL SPECULATIONS.

CHAPTER I.

A FAILURE IN MELBOURNE AND A FRESH START IN SYDNEY.



T is easy for a complaisant old gentleman while-lolling on the rosy couch of independence, to say to an unlucky bankrupt trader, "Try again, man! Push ahead! Never give up!" But it be not easy for a broken-spirited man to follow such good counsel. I do not find fault with the maxims, for it certainly is better for a man to push ahead, if he be able, than to sit down and fret over his misfortunes; but a waterman could not push ahead or pull ahead, without oars in his boat, and the stimulating advice is sometimes given without a consideration whether it is practicable for a man to adopt it. Many of Martin M'Tailing's commercial friends in Melbourne tried to start him again after his failure, by such word of mouth encouragement, but it was something like spurring a winded horse, for Martin could not push ahead in the

way they meant. He could not try again to get into his old warehouse, for it was re-let ; besides, his consigning connexion had given him up, and his old town customers would not come to him if he had nothing to sell. It was not likely.

When he failed, during a brief monetary crisis in 1866, he honestly gave up every asset he possessed to his creditors, and it was well known that he had done so—hence the hopelessness of his trying again in his old line; for who in this age would consign goods to a man who avowedly had no capital ? And who would lend him sufficient capital to start again as a merchant on the bare security of his own good name ? Besides, he had not the push-a-head pluck that he possessed when he first set up in business, a smart young man, thirty years of age, with £1,000 in the bank to his credit. Twelve years' wear and tear in a bustling city, in sharp competing times, tells upon an honest man's nervous system. But the anxiety and worry he underwent during his few weeks' struggling in the whirl of the monetary crisis told more on Martin's sensitive nature than as many years' hard work would have done. All his faculties were strained to avert the total wreck of his business, but his efforts were in vain ; he held too much paper money, which was mere waste paper to him in such a critical time. It is an old story retold—his banker was pressing when he ought to have been patient, and Martin was obliged to shut up shop. The Insolvency Court was his harbour of refuge ; it promised a more speedy termination of his troubles than an assignment of his estate would have afforded. He went into the Court, and in due course he

came out of it again, with a clean certificate and empty pockets.

Martin had often observed the marvellous elasticity of some of his trading neighbours, who would start up again (soon after a heavy failure) as springy as acrobats, and repeat the down and up again process over and over, until eventually they reached the goal of independence, at the top of their greasy pole. He, perhaps, envied such men their mercantile pluck and push, but he could not imitate them for the life of him. Doubtless he might have found a friend in the large city of Melbourne who would willingly have helped him on again in a small way, for his reputation was unblemished: but he was too diffident to ask for help, and nobody thought of volunteering it. His excessive harrassment had made him very nervous, and all his energies seemed stagnated through physical weakness.

Another thing which tended most of all to distress poor Martin, was the cruel cut he received from the lady upon whom he had set his affections, and to whom he was to have been married at the ensuing Christmastide. His business reverses dulled her respect for him—perhaps he had grown rather dull in his courting efforts; at any rate, the engagement was suddenly broken off by the lady, on the plea that her mother was opposed to it. It is unpleasant for a man to be jilted at any period of his life, but it must be more troublesome to him when he has reached the age of forty-two (as in Martin's case), because he then has not so fair a chance of finding another sweetheart as he might have had ten years before. But, notwithstanding, it is, perhaps, as keen a trial

as a true-hearted man can well experience—he seldom gets much honest sympathy from any one except, perhaps, his mother and his sisters. His outside friends are, for the most part, inclined to joke with him about it, as they would do if he had slipped down on a muddy crossing, or lost his hat over a bridge in a sudden puff. Martin met with a little of that sort of banter whenever he went into the city, but he morbidly anticipated more than he got, so he suffered twice over. He daily grew more depressed, and, though he had a consciousness of rectitude in all his dealings, he could not hold up his head when walking through the busy streets, because he had been insolvent. At length he made up his mind to leave Melbourne quietly, and try to make a fresh start for himself elsewhere. It was not a wise resolution, for an honest man had better remain where he is known, and it is a pity that he had not some sympathizing friend at hand to reason him out of his rash design, or better still, to give him the means of taking a few weeks' recreation in the country. That would, most likely, have put new life into him, and he would have returned to Melbourne ready to begin again to rebuild his fallen fortune, for he was a man of good ability and steady habits.

He had a sister in Sydney, who was married to a man in an improving business; he also had several cousins living there, and a bachelor uncle, who was reputed to be rich. Martin had no idea of leaning for support on any of his relations, still he thought they, perhaps, might help him into some way of helping himself, without hurting themselves—but whether or no, he fancied it would

be comforting to have some of his own kith and kin within hail, if he should happen to go crazy. So he started for Sydney.

Martin was kindly received by his sister, and he took up his abode in her house. Her husband was a hard-pushing man of business, robust in constitution, and bluff in manners; still he was not a bad fellow—or so his jovial friends said—and when he called Martin “a stupid ass for giving up all his assets to his creditors,” it was only his playful way of expressing his views of that phase of commercial morality. But with all his redeeming qualities, he was not the kind of man to lift up the spirits of a desponding brother, for he did not know what depression meant by personal experience, and all his words of counsel were like knuckle raps on a broken rib. For example, it was not pleasantly stimulating to hear him say, at dinner time on a Christmas day, that “he would sooner break stones on the road than be dependent on any of his relatives.” Perhaps he did not mean to be personal, but Martin felt the remark sorely; neither was it at all helpful to the cure of his dyspepsia to be badgered and jeered at every meal time in the presence of the servants and the children. Martin bore the unkindness as long as he could; and when his patience at last gave way, and he warmly rebuked his sister for laughing when her husband called him “a lazy beggar,” Mr. Blough got wroth, a row ensued, and Martin suddenly left the house, and took humble lodgings in Prince-street.

After two months’ wearisome search for employment, he at length got a berth as clerk in the store of a

provision merchant, who used to consign goods to him in Melbourne. The salary was only thirty-five shillings a week, still he was glad to get it. He continued in that post for three years ; and, meagre as the salary was, he managed to live on it, and to make a respectable appearance. In the meantime all his relatives discarded him. Although they could not reasonably believe that he was lazy, they one and all considered that he was sadly lacking in business talent, and to that weakness of character they attributed his failure in Melbourne. His rich uncle showed not a whit more sympathy for him than the rest of them ; and when Martin applied to him for the loan of £50 to start him in a small way as an exporter of eggs and bacon to the Melbourne market, he bluntly refused, on the shabby plea that he had lately made a solemn vow never to lend another shilling as long as he lived, because some rogue had cheated him.

At length the provision merchant failed, and Martin was thrown out of a situation. Then his life began to be a hard one indeed. He tried his utmost to get another berth as clerk, but he tried in vain. After a while his clothes wore very shabby, which further lessened his chances of getting a clerkship. He got a few weeks' work at translating, for he was a pretty good German scholar, and a few little jobs at copying music ; he also got some copying work now and then from a generous lawyer. He applied on two occasions for the post of tutor in a school ; but though he had received a good education himself, he did not know the essential art of imparting instruction to others. He had no experience in teaching, so he was not accepted.

To follow him through all his trials and sorrows for the three succeeding years, would be miserable work that I have no fancy for. The poor fellow was as near as he could go to the brink of destitution ; gladly would he have gone as a shepherd into the bush, if he had had the offer of such a berth. He had not yet began to beg his bread, but the necessity was imminent and the Sydney soup kitchen seemed to be his only refuge from starvation. Just at that critical juncture his uncle Ben died suddenly, and left him some of the wealth, which, no doubt the old man was sorry he could not carry away with him.

He got a suit of black clothes from a trustful slop-seller as soon as he heard of his uncle's death, and he went to the funeral deeply craped. His long-isolated relatives were all there ; and sorrow for the death of their kinsman seemed to have made them kindly disposed towards Martin. Mr. Blough touchingly suggested that they should all bury the hatchet of animosity in uncle Ben's grave. Martin's sister's affection for him was revived by the mournful bereavement of the family, and she showed quite a new interest in his welfare. She was especially desirous that he should remove at once into some respectable lodgings, near at hand, and she warmly recommended a friend of hers, whom she knew would make him comfortable. He was very willing to leave his present comfortless abode, so he at once yielded to his sister's wish, and went to lodge with Widow Carney, at Leatherkin Cottage, Redfern.

It was several months before Martin knew how much money was coming to him, for as heir-at-law he was

residuary legatee, and there were a good many legacies to be paid out of the estate. At length he received notice from the acting executor that the sum of £2,539 7s. 4d. was due to him, and he would be paid on signing the necessary release.

Martin's capital, invested at 6 per cent., would have yielded him about £150 a year—not a bad income for a man who had for years managed to live upon less than half of that sum. The sensible idea of a safe, permanent investment did occur to him, but he had honestly resolved, when he got his release from the Insolvent Court in Melbourne, that he would, if it ever lay in his power, pay every penny of his just debts, with interest. And let not his manly resolution be regarded as mere maudlin sentiment with no meaning in it, for we have seen the accomplishment of such noble designs in our commercial circles on several occasions. May we live to see many more such pleasing marks of genuine honesty! About the time of uncle Ben's death, the mining fever, as it was called, was getting to its height in Sydney, incited by the exceedingly rich yields in some of the Hill End gold mines, and also by the enormous dividends promised by some copper and tin companies; almost every man and woman, high and low, who had money at hand, were speculating in mining shares, and some of the lucky ones made sudden fortunes. Stimulated by the many examples of wise men around him, Martin determined to invest in shares, as it promised a speedy way to fulfil his heart's desire of paying every man his due, and of giving him the moral courage to hold his head straight up again in any community in

Christendom. That decision was made after much cool deliberation.

I purpose, as concisely as I can, to show how he fared as a cautious operator in the Sydney share market during the exciting season of 1872-3; a period which, I venture to say, that some of my readers will not forget until they forget all the other "pomps and vanities of this wicked world."





CHAPTER II.

MR. M'TAILING MAKES A NICE LITTLE SPEC IN GOLD,
TO BEGIN WITH.

 T was a fact very noticeable to me during the late mining mania in Sydney, that in general, the persons who were not seized with the prevalent disposition to speculate in shares were persons who had no money, nor anything convertible into money, to speculate with. I also noticed that such indigent ones were, with a few exceptions, unanimous in condemning the feverish longing for "filthy lucre" which seemed to rage in our community like a bush fire. I dare say there are some few moneyed men in the land who were stolidly proof against the temptations which beset them on every side to go in for something rich in the mining way. Possibly there are many such fortunate ones ; but in my circle of friends I only know one man of money who kept entirely aloof from mining affairs. The other day I was having a sociable chat with him on the development of things in general, and when I incidentally touched upon mining matters it was quite a new treat to me to mark the jubilant expression of his countenance. I supposed

that he was one of the happy promoters of Peak Downs, or Krohmans, who had sold out at the nick of time, and I began to congratulate him, when he said, with his habitual eccentric digital action, "No, sir ; I have never owned a single share in any mine in Australia. I have had many tempting offers from gentlemen in Sydney to take me in first hand to their wholesale ventures, but I could not be taken in. Nobody has taken me in, simply because I would not let them."

The twinkling of his half-closed eyes, and the emotional twiddling of his mouth, nose, and chin, as he said this, showed such a racy blending of conscious sagacity, self-gratulation and waggish feeling, for the misguided million, that I felt tickled into a merry mood, and I thought, if I could afford it, I should like to get about a hundred thousand of his pictures struck off as soon as possible, and send a copy to every unlucky shareholder in the land, to make them laugh.

No doubt it was tantalizing to Mr. M'Tailing, while waiting for his legacy, to hear from day to day authentic reports of the rare luck which had fallen upon certain acute citizens, who, with but comparatively little capital to work with, had suddenly become famous for their wealth. To see Mr. Stamps, the stationer, and Plugg, the tobacconist, and others rolling in riches, was enough to make him jealous. He was really glad when his sister told him of the windfall in the lap of a widowed friend of hers, who invested £10 one day in Krohmans shares, and sold out a fortnight afterwards for £30. He was glad for the widow's happy hit, but he felt grieved that he was fated to behold similar instances of luck on every

side of him, and yet be as powerless as a blind beggar to operate on the Mining Exchange. His brother-in-law, who had formerly been a sheriff's bailiff, and thought he knew a good deal about law, advised him to bring an action for damages against his late uncle's executors ; he showed him that he might prove that he had suffered an immense loss through their tardiness in paying him his dues ; for if he had had his money a few weeks ago, to invest in Krohmans shares at par, he would clearly have made 100 per cent. profit. But notwithstanding the sharp pleading of his litigious relative, Martin declined to go to law, because he could not clearly see that it would be fair and lawful to do so.

The day after he got his money safely lodged in the bank, he left his lodgings, soon after breakfast, to see what was going on in the mining market, though he had discouraging fears that he was too late for anything prime. As luck would have it, while he was turning round by the big bookshop at King-street corner, he ran up against a man whom he had known for years as a retail dealer in hats ; he was hurrying along in a profuse perspiration, and looked as highly excited as if there were a fire next door to his own shop, and he was hastening home to save his chattels.

“ Hollo, Mac ! How are you ? You are the very man I wanted to see : I did not know where you have moved to, or I would have called on you a week ago.” Mr. Blocks grasped Martin’s hand affectionately as he said this, and then he added, in a convincing tone, “ I have something here that will suit you to a T.”

"Thank you, Mr. Blocks : I bought a new hat yesterday."

"O dash the hats ! Don't mention them : I have done with that humdrum trade. I am a mining broker now ; I wonder you have not seen my advertisements. Here is one of my cards—stay, you had better take two. Look you, Mac ; I am just floating a promoters' company—100 shares, £25 each. A nice little snug thing, and I advise you to go into it. I have only fifteen shares left. Sold eighty-five since yesterday noon."

"What is it ? Where is it, Blocks ?"

"It is a gold lease at Wattle Flat. Ten acres, with three reefs running all through the claim, and all showing coarse gold. Here is the Mint certificate of a trial crushing at the rate of four ounces to the ton. No mistake about it, Mac. Can get any quantity of quartz. Surveyor's report will be down by to-morrow's post, with coloured plan showing reefs, and all the rest of it."

"Perhaps I had better wait till to-morrow," said Martin, for he had resolved to be very, very cautious in his investments. He had seen a great many of his neighbours ruined by gold speculations, in the colony he had come from.

"Ha, ha ! to-morrow, eh ! I shall have the lot sold before lunch-time, and the new prospectus in the printer's hands to-night. Mining shares are not like brick houses ; you can't stand looking at them long before you buy in these frisky times. Presto—quick—fly ! That's the talk, Mac. I must be off."

"But I can't understand what you mean by getting out a fresh prospectus, for I have had no experience at

all in these things. If you don't want me to buy a pig in a poke—as the saying is—perhaps you will explain."

"How precious green you are, Mac. Don't you see that this is a promoters' company? To simplify it; suppose you buy these fifteen shares, you will be entitled to 1,500 paid-up shares in the Wattle Dabster, which is the new company we mean to float immediately; say 20,000 shares, 10,000 fully paid up, to go to the promoters, and 10,000 offered to the public at par—or one pound a share. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I see the scheme; but I don't know anything about the claim, Blocks."

"Blow it all, man! You don't suppose I would have anything to do with a swindle, do you?"

"Oh dear, no; but I would rather go in for shares in some other mines that are developed, such as Krohmans, or Beyers and Holtermans, or Paxtons, or —"

"More fool you to go in for contributors' shares, when you can come in as a promoter in such a stunning claim as this. I'll bet you a new hat the scrip of the Wattle Dabster will be as high as Paxton's before this day month. There are names on this list that would float ten acres of pipeclay, let alone three four-foot reefs of gold. Just look at it. My word! it is something to be associated with such men as the Honourable Thomas Noakes, and Doctor Styles, and the rest of them."

"I dare say they are safe men, Blocks."

"Safe! I believe you. They would not go into anything that didn't pay—no fear! But I can't stop any longer. I shall sell every share I have left before I get to Greville's, for the public is downright ravenous for

anything rich. No trouble to sell good shares now-a-days. They go down like oysters."

"Stay half a minute, Blocks. If the thing is *bona fide*, and as you say you will guarantee it is safe—you would not deceive me I know—I don't mind taking a share or two."

"You will be sorry if you don't take the lot, Mac. I advise you as a friend. I tell you again, it is a first-rate concern."

"Well, I will take three shares, Blocks, on your recommendation. Mind, I am acting purely on your advice."

"Take five shares, then you will be qualified for a director, and will come in for the fees and other manablings. Don't miss the chance, Mac ; that's my solid advice to you, old fellow."

"Very well then, Blocks, I will take five. 'Never venture never win.'"

"All right. You can give me a cheque to-morrow, I suppose. Good-bye. I must get rid of these other ten shares, and then the thing is floated. I shall put you down as a provisional director."

Away hurried Mr. Blocks, and Martin pursued his way at a more leisurely pace, reflecting on the fortunate investment he had made, if Mr. Blocks were only moderately right in his calculations ; for it was clear that if he sold out his 500 Wattle Dabster shares at par, he would net £375 ; but if they went up to the present price of Krohmans, which Blocks confidently predicted they would do in a month or less, then he would net twice as much. Besides, it was not a large sum to risk.

There was a busy gathering of bulls and bears and

gulls on the pavement in front of Greville's, which almost blocked up the thoroughfare. Martin pushed his way up the long passage into Greville's rooms, which were thronged with eager speculators, and the buzz of conversation was like many grindstones going by steam. He was scanning the latest telegraphic news from the mines, when Mr. Blocks again accosted him—"Hullo, Mac! you are here are you, on Tom Tiddler's ground? I have done the trick—sold the ten shares two minutes after I came into the room, and could have sold ten times as many more. By the bye, I can get you a ten-pound note on your bargain, if you are at all funky over it. Yonder is my mark. That dandy German chap with a cigar in his mouth. What do you say?"

"Hum—well I don't know. It would certainly be making £10 very easily; still, if the shares are worth the advance to anybody else they are worth it to me. What do you think, Blocks? you are more experienced in these fluctuating things than I am."

"I think, as I told you before, that the shares of the Wattle Dabster will be at a premium before we get any machinery on the ground, and I'll bet you what you like I'll float the company by next Friday."

"Well I will stick to my lot, Blocks. I think they are all right," said Martin, with increasing confidence.

"They are as right as the bank, my boy. Don't you sell a single share without consulting me. If it is all the same to you, you may as well give me a cheque now, and that will save my time to-morrow, for I shall be busy posting the prospectuses, and manipulating other parts of the floating process."

Martin gave Mr. Blocks a cheque for £125, and got a printed receipt for the same, and then he returned home to his lodgings, highly pleased with his morning's work.

That evening he went to a christening party at his sister's house. He had been pressed to stand god-father for her second son who was to be named Martin. There was a gathering of the whole family at the ceremony, many members of which Martin had not seen for more than five years, until his uncle's funeral. The reunion was a very touching one, for before the party broke up there had been a complete reconciliation on all sides, and a mutual agreement to forgive and forget all past grievances, and henceforward to live together in unity, peace, and concord.

Martin presented his new little godson with a silver spoon and a knife and fork ; and when his sister opened the morocco case to show the present to the company at the supper table, she found a slip of paper upon which was written, "I promise to transfer (when the scrip is issued) to my godson, Martin Blough, one hundred fully paid-up shares in the Wattle Dabster Gold Mining Company. M. M'T."

After reading the scrap, his sister's feelings quite overcame her—she gushed into tears and then flung her arms round her generous brother's neck, and sobbed out her grateful acknowledgments. Her husband then boldly expressed his gratitude, and added that the dividends accruing from the said shares should be from time to time invested, for the sole and separate use and benefit of the said Martin Blough ; and he hoped to see him grow up

to personally express his thanks to his benevolent uncle, whose honoured name he bore.

When Martin returned to his lodgings, Mrs. Carney told him that a gentleman had called twice during the evening, and said he wished to see Mr. M'Tailing on business of importance.

"Did he tell you his name, Mrs. Carney?"

"No, sir. He said it was of no consequence; but he left a note, which I put on your dressing-glass, for I thought perhaps you would be home late."

Martin went for the note, and read as follows:—

"Dear Mac,—Five years ago you kindly lent me your over-coat, which I unluckily lost. I have never forgotten the obligation, nor my indebtedness to you, and I have often longed for an opportunity of showing my eagerness to repay your kindness. The time has come. I can put you up to something that will reimburse you for your lost coat a thousand-fold. I am sorry I have missed you to-night. I cannot conveniently call on you to-morrow morning, because our shop opens at 7; but if you will be at the Telegraph Office at 11 o'clock to the minute, I will meet you there and tell you all the particulars, which I cannot explain in this note.—Yours ever,

"JOHN SLASH."

Martin read the note a second time before he turned into bed; and, as he drew his nightcap over his ears, he muttered to himself, "I have good reason for believing Slash to be a shabby rogue, since I proved that he pawned my greatcoat on the very night he borrowed it of me. Still, he may know of something that is worth my while to look after; at all events, there can be no risk in my meeting him to-morrow. No fear of him wanting me to lend him another coat."

"Yawgh! I am sorry I did not take the fifteen shares when Blocks pressed me so hard. Well—never mind; it is best to be cautious; and perhaps it will be the wisest plan to scatter my capital over a good many ventures."

These were the last wakeful thoughts of Martin on that night.





CHAPTER III.

MR. M'TAILING GOES INTO COPPER.

JUST as the wooden blackfellow was lifting his sledge-hammer to register the first chime of eleven, on the clock bell opposite to the old Telegraph Office, Mr. Slash rushed up and seized Martin's hand.

"Mac, my friend, you are a kind, forgiving fellow," said Slash, with a tender show of tears in his eyes. "I scarcely expected you would meet me, after that mishap of mine with your coat. But we have not time at present to talk about past misfortune, let us hope to mend matters. I have only twenty minutes to spare, for my governor is so precious sharp. Will you step with me into M'Cullum Brothers', over the way. They are just floating a promoters' company, and I think you will be in time to get a share or two. The list was not quite closed last night. I am anxious for you to go into this spec, Mac, because I *know* it to be first-rate, and I owe you an obligation which I am longing to square up. Please to come over with me at once. By the bye, I was sorry to hear of your poor uncle's death."

"What company is it you recommend so highly?" asked Martin, very coolly. He was determined to be on his guard with Mr. Slash this time, for he suspected that he would as soon steal his cash as his coat, if he got half a chance of fingering it.

"It is a copper concern, Mac, called the Northern Bullseye, immediately adjoining the Southern Bullseye Company's mine. You know their shares are selling like winking at 35s., which is 75 per cent. above par. I believe this new northern mine will knock the southern one into fits. The consulting engineer came down by the train yesterday, and his report has caused such a rush for shares that I am half afraid we shall be too late to get any at par. It is really marvellous how they are going off."

"Who are the persons that are floating the company?"

"You know the M'Cullum Brothers, of course?"

"Yes, I know they are respectable men; but they are only the brokers, I suppose, and brokers do not often know much about practical mining."

"But the consulting engineer is a very clever, practical man, and has had vast experience in Victorian and in South Australian mines. Besides, there are names of some tip-top men, in Sydney and Bathurst, on the share list—men who, morally speaking, would not touch anything dirty to save their lives. Come and see the list, Mac ; don't take my bare word. But do look sharp ; I must be back at my shop in fifteen minutes, or I shall be swopped."

Martin did not feel much stimulated by the hurried gabble of Mr. Slash ; nevertheless, he followed him into

a doorway across the street, and up a narrow creaking stairway, into a very dingy room on the second floor. Martin entered with some concern for his life and limbs, for there was such a hollow in the centre of the room that he feared if an additional weight were upon it, it would drop down into the ground floor. There were two tables, behind one of which stood the junior brother M'Cullum, looking as blandly benevolent as a good Samaritan making ointment for indigent cripples. Before him on the table lay a share list, with many names on it, extending nearly down to the bottom line. Martin had known him from his boyhood (for Martin had lived many years in Sydney before he went to Victoria), so he shook hands familiarly and asked a few questions respecting the company he was floating.

"We believe it to be a genuine thing, Martin, or you may depend we would not undertake to float it on any terms. I have personally invested in it, which is a further proof of my good opinion of it, and you can see by this list that some of the most respectable and most wealthy men in Sydney have faith in it; in fact, the share list is all but closed. It will fill up to-day, I have no doubt."

"I have a little money to invest, and I must take care to place it safely," said Martin, with a sort of appealing look, like a poor dumb man saying "Pray don't rob me."

"You are quite right to be cautious, Martin. There are lots of sham things about the town, I can tell you, so look out. For my part, I would not have aught to do with a thing that I did not believe to be genuine, if it promised to make me a rich man again. As I said

before, I believe this to be all right. I cannot say more ; you must use your own judgment. There is the mining engineer, who came down yesterday from the claim, he knows more about it than I do, you had better speak to him. All I can say is, that you must decide promptly, for you see the share list is nearly filled up. Good things are floated very speedily now there is such a general desire for mining speculation."

Martin turned round to speak to the consulting engineer, but he saw that there were nearly a dozen gentlemen closely consulting him, so he modestly kept outside of the circle, and listened to the engineer's replies to the various questions that were put to him concerning the mine. He was an intensely sharp-looking man, with a powerful gift of utterance, and a self-assurance that Martin could not but admire—the more so, perhaps, because it was a virtue in which he himself was lacking to a painful degree. No doubt Mr. Sprightly would be an able engineer, even if he possessed but half the knowledge he laid claim to, but the prevailing impression was that he was extra clever. From his emphatic statements, and from the rough diagram which he held up to the view of his auditory, Martin gathered that the selection of the Northern Bullseye proprietary was a happy hit, unparalleled since the days of the famous Burra Burra, with which mine the said engineer professed to be in some way connected. In short, it appeared to Martin that there were sundry mineral mountains, in the selection, interspersed with convenient valleys, and all that was requisite to be done was simply to drive tunnels right and left into the mountain's sides

—truck the ore out into the valley—bag it up carefully—cart it to Rydal—carry it by train to Sydney—ship it to Newcastle—smelt it at Waratah—receive back the pure ingots the week after next—sell them in Sydney, or ship them to London—and presently pocket a dividend of at least 60 per cent. per month. All that seemed to the mind's eye of Martin a very pleasant picture, without a single defacing daub or flaw about it. He thought it was a first-rate property; indeed, there was no other conclusion to come to, if Mr. Sprightly's statements were correct, and that he was practically incapable of making a mistake, his printed testimonials might assure anybody who took the trouble to read them. Moreover, his statements were in some measure endorsed by several trustworthy shareholders, who had seen the mountains with their own eyes.

Martin paid no heed to the repeated nudgings of Slash, or his whispered advice to go in for a dozen shares before they were all snapped up; but he leant against the wall, and while he listened to the further demonstrations of Mr. Sprightly, he was trying to keep his judgment cool for action. He had just mentally resolved that he would go home to dinner, and take an hour or two to reflect on the matter, in the quietude of his lodgings, when a stout gentleman rushed into the room, with both his hands and arms laden with greenish-looking lumps, which he proudly flung on the table, and said, "Here are some specimens just come down by train." Martin thought the gentleman looked as if he had taken a few nobblers to embolden him to carry the heavy specimens up the ricketty stairs. There was a

rush to the table, and Mr. Sprightly forthwith began to show his knowledge of metallurgy by explaining, scientifically, all about blue and green carbonites and black oxides, and estimating to a tittle what the specimens would yield in merchantable copper, pure enough for ships' bottoms, tea kettles, and what not.

It was indeed very rich ore. Of course every panting speculator present believed that it came from the Northern Bullseye claim; but that was a little innocent mistake, which they did not discover just then. The sample certainly had come down that morning by train, but it did not come from that company's claim; nor did the stout gentleman state that it had come from there—let us do him justice—how could he or any other man get rich copper ore out of mountains of pure dirt? Impossible!

While the other customers were fingering the copper specimens, and listening to the technical farrago of Mr. Sprightly, Martin, with native shrewdness, stole up to McCullum, junior (who still stood behind his table, mildly waiting for results), and whispered, "How many shares have you left, John?"

"Just half-a-dozen," said McCullum, after counting the blank lines on the bottom of his list.

"What is the price? State the lowest figure for the lot?"

"Fifty pounds each, cash down."

I will take them all, John, and give you a cheque on the spot. It is a large sum to stake, but I think I am right."

Mr. McCullum filled up the list, and put it inside his desk. While he was writing a receipt for Martin, there

was a rush towards his table. Mr. Sprightly had at length thoroughly convinced some half-dozen of his listeners that the spec was the best thing in the market, and they were "going in for it a docker," to use an expressive phrase of the period. But they were all too late for a docker. Martin had got the start of them. The promoters' share list was closed.

An exciting scene ensued, and Martin heard Mr. John M'Cullum savagely accused of playing into the hands of his friends. He did not stop to hear more; he safely pocketed his receipt, and walked leisurely home, in an effervescing state of mind, which can only be understood by lucky men.

He had scarcely sat comfortably down to dinner, when a boy on horseback galloped up to the door with a note, the contents of which were as follows:—

"DEAR MARTIN,—I have got into sad disfavour by letting you clear off the balance of Bullseyes—in fact one man threatens to smash me. Say by bearer, will you let me have one share at ten pounds advance, just to pacify the fellow. You will then have the necessary number of shares to qualify you for a seat on the Directory. Yours, in haste, J. M'C."

Martin, with genuine kindness, immediately wrote in reply:—

DEAR JOHN,—You may have one share for £60, but I will not sell any more.—Yours, M. M'T."

I dare say the messenger boy remembers to this day the pleasant looking face of Mr. M'Tailing, as he handed him the note for his master, and a half-crown for himself.

It will be supposed—though I have omitted to state the fact before—that Martin had smartened up his outward man since he received his money. The slop suit of mourning, which he got in his extremity, was given to a needy neighbour, on the day after Holle sent him his new outfit. His altered appearance in his fashionable attire was wonderful. His familiar friends said he looked like a young buck ; and the increased deference which his neighbours paid him, showed how solemnly they were influenced by the superior cut and quality of his garments.

A man who would ignore the tailor's art is a simpleton. That there is a respect-yielding virtue in good cloth, may be proved any day by any man who will appear in public clad in fustian in the morning, and in a dress suit in the afternoon. As I have before stated, Martin was not a vain man, far from it ; still he could not help thinking more of himself in his new, well-cut clothes, than he thought of himself when he had patches on his elbows and knees. It was natural.





CHAPTER IV.

THE NORTHERN BULLSEYE COPPER COMPANY IS FLOATED.

ROR more than a week Martin was confined to his room by a bilious attack, induced, he thought, by the over-excitement of speculation and richer diet than he had been accustomed to for many years past. Mrs. Carney nursed him with care and tenderness, which he could not but appreciate, and his sister called every day to see how he was doing—so he had no lack of sympathy. When he was able to sit up in an easy chair by the parlour fire, he amused himself looking over a vast number of printed prospectuses of new mining companies, which had been sent to him by post. Many of the papers he threw into the fire, feeling assured by a glance at the names of the projectors, that they were bubble concerns, which would soon burst and damage any simple body that had anything to do with them; and he was doubly determined to go into nothing but what was of a genuine stamp, and was supported by men of wealth and standing. He marked a few of the prospectuses with a dab of red ink, which signified that they were worth looking after, for the projectors were

men of credit and renown, and the brokers' names were pure.

As soon as he was able to go out, he attended a meeting of the Northern Bullseye proprietors, at Mr. M'Cullum's office. The room was crowded when he got there, and Mr. Hairspring, one of the provisional directors, was giving an exciting account of his recent official visit to the property at Bull Flat. He was a cannie-looking man, and his eyes sparkled with honest sharpness. He had worked with metals ever since he left school, so his opinions carried weight with the meeting, and everybody believed in him. He stated that he had been to the bottom of the Southern Bullseye mine, and of course paid his footing before he was allowed to come up again. He had chatted with the mining manager when underground, and also while taking a social cup of tea in his house. It would be a breach of friendship to tell all that the Southern manager had said to him ; there could be no harm, however, in saying that he seemed very anxious to have a finger in the Northern mine. He did not like to say much about it, because it was a sort of opposition concern ; but a nod is always as good as a wink to a clever man, and Mr. Hairspring got a quiet clue from the manager—or the tail end of a clue—and, aided by the sharp-sighted Mr. Sprightly, he traced the natural bubbling up to the surface of rich copper indications in the form of gosson, up hill and down hill, from the Southern Bullseye to the Northern Bullseye, as clearly as kangaroo tracks on a sandy road. He had brought a fair sample of the gosson in his pocket.

While he paused a minute to pull out his specimens,

he was greeted with loud applause for his sagacity and perseverance. But there was one man present who groaned when the others cheered. He was evidently dissatisfied, and in a blunt way he expressed his belief that Mr. Hairspring had not seen copper enough on the surface to make his wife a thimble, or even a bodkin. He had been a miner all his life, and knew what was what. It was speedily ascertained, by reference to the share list, that the disagreeable man only held half a share ; and, as he was suspected of plotting to lower the price, in order to buy in all he could get for a mere song, he was politely pushed out of the room by two of the biggest shareholders present. It was a solemn caution to other tricky men to mind what they said at that meeting.

Mr. Hairspring then made some more pleasing statements, from which Martin deduced that the Northern Company's property was vastly superior in value to the Southern company's mine—rich as it was—inasmuch as the latter company had made a great hole in their land, and the former company held their claim in the normal condition which nature had formed it, and it had lots of trees fit for firewood on its surface. It was clear, therefore, that the intrinsic value of the two properties was in proportion to a cask of stout or other fluid full to the bung, and a similar cask that had been on tap ever so long. No other deduction could be reasonable.

Martin's sickness had kept him away from the busy world for a fortnight, so he was but imperfectly acquainted with what had been done by his brother shareholders in the interim ; but he gleaned, since he came into the room,

that there were forty-five acres of level land at the base of their mountains, which was supposed by Mr. Sprightly to be a sort of natural pocket, into which all the richest of the copper ore had gravitated. The owner of the said rich plot had agreed to sell it for £10,000, and he further agreed to wait ten days for the acceptance of his offer. Sprightly said it was dirt cheap, and others soon imbibed his opinion, for he had a persuasive tongue. But there were practical obstacles in the way of buying the pocket, or, in plainer terms, the provisional directors could not raise the money to pay for it. They had incurred the expense of printing prospectuses of a company with £100,000 capital, but it was found that there was not sufficient public appreciation to float it off the stocks, although Mr. Sprightly and some others "worked the oracle" as desperately as sailors pumping for their bare lives.

It is supposed that the eminent engineer, Brunel, worked his life out in his excessive exertions to float the "Great Eastern" steamship from her position in the mud at Millwall, when she accidentally slipped off the stocks. His inventive genius and perseverance were, however, equal to the stupendous task, and eventually his hydraulic rams and wedges set the monster ship afloat, despite the opinions of cynical on-lookers, who said that he might as well try to float one of the great pyramids of Egypt. Not less zealous and inventive—although less successful—were Mr. Sprightly and his confidential helpers in their efforts to float the Northern Bullseye copper property into a capital of £100,000. True, they did not use hydraulic rams and wedges, nor any mechanical appli-

ances of the sort, but they used telegrams and dodges, and numberless manœuvres that never entered the brain of a Brunel, or any other worthy gentleman. Nor did they cease their efforts until all hope was hopeless, and their exhausted energies were scarcely vital enough to gasp out a final "No go!"

It was lucidly explained by the chairman of the meeting that it had been found impracticable to float a new company on so large a capital as £100,000, and therefore the idea of purchasing the forty-five acre plot had been necessarily abandoned — for the present. He stated also, that, lest Mr. Sprightly should have overlooked anything that was worth seeing, and in order to make assurance doubly sure, they had sent a second consulting engineer to view the property, in company with a respectable member of the Provisional Board ; and the report of those gentlemen was, on the whole, of a satisfactory character, and fully corroborated the statement of Mr. Hairspring as to the outcrop of gosson, and other promising features of their claim. The quality of their property was therefore established beyond all controversy.

A long discussion then ensued, which it would, perhaps, be wrong of me to report. Presently, however, by way of coming to a practical point, it was proposed by an influential shareholder, and seconded by another influential shareholder, that the stock of the company should be rateably apportioned to the present promoters. That is to say—the holder of each fifty pound share should be entitled to three hundred one-pound shares, considered as fully paid-up, and one hundred contributors'

shares, of one pound each. By that easy plan the company would start off with a capital of £60,000; nominal, of course, but tangible to a safe extent; for all the contributors' shares would be subject to calls, which would be made fast enough. Thus a good deal of trouble and delay would be avoided, and the present promoters would keep all the accruing benefit to themselves, instead of sharing it with the public. They would still be allowed the option of selling their contributors' shares for as much as they could get for them, or of keeping them and paying all calls when called for.

As nothing could be fairer than all that, the resolution was put to the meeting and was carried unanimously. The Northern Bullseye Copper Company was then formally declared to be all afloat, and a ballot for directors took place immediately. Martin lost his seat at the board by only seven votes. Several votes of thanks were then passed, to the provisional directors, to Mr. Hairspring, to the consulting engineers, and to the persevering brokers, and the meeting broke up in the best possible humour.

Never, perhaps, did any board of directors in the world more thoroughly believe in the genuineness of their trust, than did the first board of the Northern Bullseye Copper Company. They were all good men and true. Men whose names stood equally high on the commercial exchange as in social life,—in short, men of high principle,—not one of whom but would as soon have handled a red-hot copper ingot as sign his name to a scrip voucher, if he did not firmly believe it to be as safe as a City Bank note. Furthermore, the directors had the largest number of shares amongst them; and the brokers, the legal

manager, and the mining manager also, were shareholders ; so the whole concern seemed as cozy and safe as a family coach. Is it a wonder, then, that Martin should rejoice in being a fortunate holder of fifteen hundred paid-up shares, and five hundred contributors' shares, in that very promising company ?

After leaving the meeting, Martin went straightway to the Exchange, to lunch with a brother Bullseye, who in the overflow of his joy at having seven promoters' shares, volunteered to shout a bottle of champagne. Under the influence of that beguiling liquor, Martin was persuaded to buy one hundred shares in the "Jolly Lark Gold Sluicing Company." But he regretted his bargain an hour afterwards, because he did not personally know any of the directors of the said company ; so he called in at Block's office and instructed him to sell the Jolly Larks immediately. In those stirring days almost anything could be sold promptly, and in about half-an-hour Mr. Blocks had made a sale at two shillings a share premium. Martin pocketed £7 10s. by that easy transaction, and he felt pleased.

Perhaps nothing tends to encourage a man more than success. The smooth launch of the Northern Bullseye, and his subsequent little chance spec in Jolly Larks, stimulated Martin into a speculative mood. Doubtless the champagne had something to do with it also ; at any rate he was easily persuaded by Mr. Blocks to go somewhat heavily into British Lions at 24s., and Rapps at 23s. He was assured, upon the honour of Blocks, that these two specs were first-rate, and would pay to keep, or he might sell them next week at a profit.

"Now, I tell you what I will do with you, Mac," said Blocks, in a most brotherly tone, when those bargains were completed. "If you like to go in for some little choice things which I can put you up to from day to day, I will take all the trouble of buying and selling, and go halves with you in the profits. You find money and I find brains, as the saying is. You will be perfectly safe, for I am perhaps the most cautious broker in Sydney. What do you say?"

"I would rather not make any arrangement of that sort, Blocks, thank you all the same. I am not anxious to speculate. I wish to invest my capital in a few solid, permanent concerns, and when I have done that I will sit down quietly and live upon my dividends, for I feel that this sort of occupation is too exciting for me."

"Well, Mac, I won't try to persuade you to anything that you are not disposed for. But I say, you may as well drop into my office whenever you come to town; and if I know of anything that is really good as an investment, like the stock you have bought from me to-day, for instance, I will let you have it for old acquaintance sake."

Martin again thanked Mr. Blocks, and then he started homewards. On the way thither he bought a prime kippered salmon for Mrs. Carney, and a box of figs for her boys. He thought he ought to make her some little acknowledgment, in a delicate way, for her very kind attention to him when he was poorly. He knew she always liked something savoury for her tea, and he was glad he had thought of the salmon when passing Peate and Harcourt's shop.



CHAPTER V.

MR. M'TAILING GOES INTO THE BILLYBLOWER CRUSHING COMPANY.



MRS. CARNEY was much pleased with Martin's present, and said he was very kind and thoughtful. Her boys liked the figs.

When they sat down to the tea-table Martin noticed that Mrs. Carney looked as if she had something on her mind that she wished to discharge. Usually at meal time she chid her sons for eating too fast ; but on that occasion she bade them make haste and get their tea, like good boys, and then go up-stairs to their lessons. When they were gone, she said, " I'm expecting my cousin Philip here at 7 o'clock, and I was anxious to get the boys out of the way, for their little ears are always open. My cousin is very desirous of seeing you, sir ; and I thought you would not consider it too great a liberty if I introduced him to you. He is a respectable man, a son of Temperance, and a——"

" I shall be proud to see him, Mrs. Carney," interrupted Martin, in his eagerness to show her that he was not at all displeased at her inviting her kinsman to meet him. " Does he live in Sydney?"

"He lives at Redfern, with his wife and family, but his office is in town."

"Is he a lawyer, may I ask?"

"No, sir; he is what is called a gold assayer now. He was for many years an assistant at Glauber and Company's, the chemists; but he left there soon after this great mining excitement began, and took to assaying metals for the new mining companies. I think he is doing very well, for he seems always busy. He was living in a little poking house of only four rooms, that he built for himself by means of his building society's shares; but he sold it a few months ago and bought some shares in Beyers' and Holtermann's gold claim at a pound each. He sold them the other day for £2 8s. a share more than they cost him, and he received two dividends besides. He can afford to live in a nice large house now."

"He is a fortunate man, Mrs. Carney."

"Yes, that he is, sir; everything he touches seems to turn to gold, as the saying is. But some people are born to be rich, while others have to struggle all their life through in poverty."

Martin merely nodded an assent to that proposition. A short pause then ensued, during which he was abstractedly pondering on the advisability of buying into Beyers' and Holtermann's rich claim without delay. Presently Mrs. Carney said, "I am sorry you do not belong to our church, Mr. M'Tailing."

Martin began to be very uneasy about what she was going to say next. His conscience had often rebuked him because he was not a member of either a church or

chapel, but he had lately resolved that he certainly would begin to be religious as soon as he had safely invested all his money. Mrs. Carney noticed his embarrassment, and said, encouragingly, "On second thoughts, I do not think it is positively necessary for you to belong to us, in order to get a share or two, but I will find out when my cousin comes. He knows more about the spec than I do, and I am sure he will manage to get you some if it is to be done."

"Pray what shares do you refer to, ma'am?" Martin asked.

"Oh, I forgot that I had not told you before. I will explain all about it as well as I can. Mr. Kean, one of our preachers in the country, has lately come to town to float a gold company; not in the way of business, you know, sir, but by a sort of sociable private method, for he is anxious that it should be owned by members of our church, who will do good with their gains. He is a very nice man, sir. I am told that the claim is amazingly rich, and it is more than fifty times bigger than Krohman's lot; and my cousin Philip thinks it is very cheap at £5,000. I thought it was my duty to tell you of it, sir, as I heard you say last week, that you were anxious to go into respectable openings."

"I thank you for your thoughtfulness, Mrs. Carney. But is it not a very unusual thing for a parson to float a gold company?"

"Yes, no doubt it is, sir. I never heard of such a thing being done before; but under the peculiar circumstances of the case, Mr. Kean is quite justified in doing it; and I am certain he feels in the right path. I know

for a printed fact that a good many parsons in the colony have gone into mines, and I cannot see that there is any sin in it, sir, so long as they don't actually throw off their coats and cravats, and go to work with pickaxes."

"Oh dear no! Pray do not think that I insinuated as much, ma'am. Parsons have as good a right to make an honest pound as laymen have—at least I think so—that is, provided they do not neglect their own legitimate duties. They do not get too well paid, as a rule."

"No, indeed, they do not, sir; and it is too much to expect them to stand by and see their flocks nibbling up gold like buttercups, and they not to touch it at all. It isn't in human nature, sir."

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Carney. But what is the name of the mine that this respected pastor is now trying to float, may I ask?"

"It is called the Billyblower Crushing Company. Ha! ha! A funny name, to be sure; but you must remember Mr. Kean did not give it that name. Not at all. He is a man of refined taste. It was owned by two brothers in his district, and they quarrelled, simply because one hit the other two cracks on the head with a shovel; so the parson, as in duty bound, stepped in as a peacemaker, and they agreed to separate if he could sell their claim amongst his friends and brethren in Sydney. That is all I know about it, sir. Perhaps I have not told you the exact particulars, though I don't think I am far out. Any way, it is a safe thing; and, to tell you the truth, I have drawn part of my little hoard from the Savings' Bank to buy a share. It was only twenty-five pounds."

"Pray be cautious, my dear Mrs. Carney! Excuse me for presuming to advise you; but there are so many new companies floated every day, and I fear they are not all good ones; in fact, I am sure that some of them are gross shams, or, to use a stronger term, downright swindles. I have opportunities of quietly observing a good deal in my frequent visits to the city."

"I am much obliged to you for your good advice, sir. It behoves every one to be cautious now-a-days, but especially a lone woman with but a small income. I have no doubt this affair is perfectly safe, because I know almost every person who has taken shares in it. They are all good people—many of them are ministers—and all very honest. My cousin has great confidence in it. There he is at the door now, sir. That's his rattat I know."

Mr. Philip Drench was a shrewd looking man, with a self-confident air, as if he felt assured that he was on the highway to independence. After a formal introduction by Mrs. Carney, he shook hands with Martin, and said he was proud of making his acquaintance; he had often heard of him in town, but never had the pleasure of meeting him before. He then took a seat at the fireside, and began to show that the strength of his conversational powers was very great. His brain seemed to contain a register of all the mining companies in the colony, and some of the Victorian companies as well; and Martin was surprised to learn from him that in addition to the lengthy list of mining companies afloat which he had received as a supplement to his last copy of the *Sydney Mail*, that there were numberless other companies in

course of floatation, with the names and prospects of which Mr. Drench seemed quite familiar. The latest new thing afloat, he said, was "The Shallowstream Gold Diving Company." It had not been advertised at all, but all the shares were taken up.

"Gold Diving Company!" exclaimed Martin. "I presume you are joking"

"Not at all, sir. It is no joke, I assure you, for some of the projectors are as serious men as you will find anywhere. I have a receipt in my pocket-book for shares which I bought this afternoon. There it is, you see, £10—a legally stamped receipt. Two shares fully paid up."

"Well, well! You astonish me. What next shall I hear of? A deep sea gold diving company, I suppose. Who in the name of fortune projected such a sinking scheme as that?"

"Some local gentlemen, I believe, but I do not know their names. I know the chairman of the Sydney Board very well, and it was my faith in him which led me to go into the thing. You know him, I dare say, sir, Mr. Brougham; and perhaps you also know the treasurer, Mr. John Pine?"

"Yes, I have known both those gentlemen for years, and I feel certain that neither of them would wittingly lend themselves to a sham affair."

"It is not a sham affair, sir. I saw the new diving dress and all the connecting apparatus to-day; and the diver and his party will leave by to-night's steamer for the scene of their operations; and Mr. John Pine is to accompany them, with a large thief-proof safe to put the

gold in as the diver scoops it up from the bottom of the river. The spot where they are going to dive is said to abound with gold nuggets, which lie smuggled under the beds of the mud oysters. No mistake about it, sir."

" Well, this is indeed a marvellous epoch that I have lived to see," muttered Martin, in a sort of dreamy soliloquy. Presently he said, " I do not know if it has ever struck you, Mr. Drench, as it has struck me, that we gold mine proprietors who live at home at ease, incur a considerable risk in losing some of the results of our crushings, where the returns are left solely to the conscientiousness of the mining managers, and no other check."

" There is some show of reason in your remark, Mr. M'Tailing. I grant that the absence of any system of check is a temptation to a manager of lax principles."

" It seems to me about as simple to expect any mortal man, on a mere living wage, to withstand such a dazzling temptation to pocket a nugget occasionally, as it would be to put a little toddling infant into a bin ankle deep in sugar plums, and expect him not to eat any."

" An honest man would not touch a pin's head that did not belong to him, sir," replied Mr. Drench, with a severely virtuous look at Martin, which made him blush, and he was glad to change the subject, so he asked, " Do you know anything of the Brownman's Reef Gold Mining Company, Mr. Drench ? "

" I don't know much about the *reef*, sir ; and perhaps that is what everybody else concerned might truthfully say. Have you any shares in it ? "

" I have not bought any yet, but I am thinking of

buying some. The mine has been highly recommended to me by an old friend of mine, who I do not think would deceive me, and I have seen an assayer's report of a sample of stuff from the claim, showing more than an ounce of gold to the ton."

Mr. Drench here gave his shoulders a shrug or two, lifted his eyebrows almost half-way up to the crown of his head, and winked one eye. Martin could not but notice such significant movements, and he politely asked Mr. Drench what he meant to insinuate by them.

"Oh, nothing particular. I beg your pardon. It is a professional habit I have got into, whenever I hear people talk about assayers' reports of ounces to the ton, nothing more, sir. I don't know the proprietors of Brownman's Reef; it has only just been put into the market. By the bye, while I think of it, let me tell you of a snug little claim that is being now quietly floated off, by a few men of the right sort. It is ten acres at Wattle Flat, on the very crown of a ridge which is undoubtedly rich in reefs and veins. The proprietors are modest men, as you will judge by the incredulously low sum they are asking for their claim, £1,000, in one hundred promoters' shares of £10 each. You may safely take a few shares in this company at my recommendation, Mr. M'Tailing."

"What is the name of it?" Martin asked, and he took out his tablets to make a note of it, as he usually did of anything that seemed extra good.

"It is called 'The Faith, Hope, and Charity.' A happy name, I think, considering the absurdly ridiculous names that are given to some of the new companies.

The proprietors facetiously showed their charity at the first set off, by giving a little of the first money they received for shares to certain of the charitable institutions in the city. A contract has been accepted for driving a tunnel into the hill, and it is calculated that a rich reef will be struck at 47 feet 6 inches. If you like to say the word I will get you a few shares to-morrow from the legal manager himself."

"I think I will venture to take two shares, at your recommendation. Twenty pounds is not a large sum to risk," said Martin, after a few minutes' consideration.

"All right. If you will call at my office any day you go into town, I will have the scrip ready for you; and I can then tell you of a few other little specs that you cannot err in going into."

"Mrs. Carney was speaking to me about the Billy-blower Company. Do you think you can get me a couple of shares in that, Mr. Drench?"

"Hum—ah—let me think a bit," replied Mr. Drench, and he rubbed his beard up into his mouth and bit some ragged ends off. "The sales up to the present time have been confined exclusively to members of our own body, but I think I may manage to get you two shares, as you are a friend of my cousin—in short, I will promise to get them for you to-morrow. It is an uncommonly good thing; one of the most promising that I have yet gone into."

"Then I will take two shares, if you please, Mr. Drench."

"Very good, sir. You will perhaps be glad to know that some of our worthy shareholders have agreed to give

a part of their first dividend to church building purposes; and one old gentleman has promised to treat each of his little grandsons to a pair of new knickerbockers."

"It is very commendable of them," said Martin, smiling. "As I am, unhappily, not connected with any church, and I have no grandsons, I will promise you, Mrs. Carney, to make a present of the whole of any first dividend to your boys."

Mr. Drench shouted "hear, hear!" and Mrs. Carney could scarcely find words enough to express her gratitude, but she said her boys should thank him in the morning. After a little longer chat on the all-prevailing topic, mining, Mr. Drench departed, and Martin went straight-way to bed, lest Mrs. Carney should again overwhelm him with thanks for his forthcoming dividend in the Billyblower Crushing Company.





CHAPTER VI.

MR. M'TAILING GOES INTO SOMETHING EXTRA RICH
IN GOLD.

CHAMPAGNE is sweetly tickling to the palate, and it has a genial influence on one's feelings, for half-an-hour or so after sipping a moderate quantity; but a tipple beyond moderation is very confusing to a weak head, and anything but composing to a tender stomach for the next day or two. Joy and misery are often sipped out of the same bottle.

Martin was soberly thinking over his own experience in that way, as he sat by the fire after breakfast on the morning after the events recorded in my preceding chapter. His head was aching, and he was otherwise out of sorts. He had just made up his mind to spend a quiet day at home, and doctor himself a little, when the postman called with a half-dozen letters addressed to Martin M'Tailing, Esq. He had been accustomed of late to receive, on an average, the same number of letters every day, so the delivery was not unusually large. He opened them mechanically, for he was not in a spirited mood. Four of them were prospectuses of new things

in gold and copper ; and one was a bedazzling programme of a projected opal mining company, an affair of unparalleled promise. He laid them all aside for the present. The other letter was from a gentleman with whom he had a slight acquaintance some years before, when he was a member of a choral club ; but he had not seen him to speak to for a long time. The contents of his letter was as follows :—

" MY DEAR SIR,—I intended to call on you personally, but my time is much occupied out of office hours, as you know. I have heard of your good fortune, through your uncle's death, and I heartily congratulate you. Few men whom I know deserve a stroke of good luck more than you do. My object in writing to you now is to tell you of a rare spec in gold, which I and six of my personal friends have just gone into. We want one more to complete our limited number of eight, and I thought of you, knowing you to be a respectable and a responsible man. I cannot give you particulars in a letter ; all I will say is that it is something worth your while to look after. But you must not delay, for I know at least a dozen persons who would be glad of the chance to go into the thing. If you like to call on me, any time to-day I will explain all to you. It will be too late to-morrow. Bear that in mind. If you come to the office, please to give a postman's knock in duplicate, to signify to me that you are not on the Queen's business. As everybody is having a go at mining now-a-days, I cannot see that the Government has a moral right to interfere with me for dabbling a little in a quiet way ; in short, I don't think that any of my official superiors could throw a stone at me without its rebounding at their own heads. But it is as well to be careful. You understand. Rap twice two, then I shall know what's what.—Yours truly, C. SPARROW."

As soon as Martin read the letter he told Judith, the maid, to bring his boots, and to stop the first omnibus. He had great faith in Mr. Sparrow, and forgetting his

ailments, he equipped himself for prompt action. Half-an-hour afterwards he gave two double raps on the door of Mr. Sparrow's office, and was instantly admitted. "Glad to see you, Mr. M'Tailing. You are just in time. I have put you in for a rich and rare spec, that may make your fortune over again. Ha, ha ! We have hit upon the real thing this time!"

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Sparrow. You are very kind. Will you tell me what the speculation is. I have no doubt it is a safe one."

"O, ah, yes ; I must explain it all to you. This is it, in few words. My friend, Mr. Tubal, went up to Oakey Creek three weeks ago for change of air, and he perchance fell in with a brother chip—as they say—who has a gold claim in the very heart of the Oakey ; and, for old acquaintance sake, he showed Tubal a choice little unoccupied lot adjoining his own, which we believe will turn out one of the richest things that has yet been heard of in this colony, and will beat some of the Victorian mines out and out. Tubal jumped at the chance in a minute, and got it pegged out immediately by moonlight. Here is a rough plan of it, which he drew himself on the spot. A clever fellow is Tubal ! It is a ten-acre selection, and here you see the veins and reefs, marked with a blue pencil, running all through it, like the veins and sinews in a shoulder of mutton. Wonderful !"

"Dear me ! It must be a rich claim, indeed, if it has as many reefs on it as this plan exhibits. Are they all auriferous, do you think, sir ?"

"Not a doubt of it. Every one of them is gold-bearing. Tubal saw them cropping up out of the ground

at every step, and he brought a sample home in his tobacco pouch, which I pounded with my own hands in an iron mortar. Here is the result in this phial. You can see the specks of gold."

"Yes, I can see them, like stars in the Milky Way."

"Exactly so. Now, if that quantity of gold could be extracted by such simple means out of a mere mouthful of stuff, what could be got out of a ton, with the first-rate machinery that we shall erect on the ground?"

"That seems to me like a simple rule of three sum," said Martin, with a facetious smile.

"Rule of three thousand, you may say, for there are thousands of tons of stone to be got without sinking much deeper than a grave. I believe it will be a fortune for us all. Ah, you may grin, but I mean it, sir."

"I do not for one moment doubt your word or honour, Mr. Sparrow. Pray, what will be the price of a share?" Martin said this very deferentially, for he knew Mr. Sparrow's touchy nature of old, and he was very careful of offending him by word or look. He was sorry he had attempted a joke.

"The price is a mere nothing. Thirty-five pounds to you, but I asked a chap £500 for a half-share this morning. We did not want him in our society, because he is a vulgar fellow. Here are the names of the seven proprietors, and you may make the eighth, if you like to decide at once."

"I see the Hon. Jonathan Blunt is one of us," remarked Martin, as he scanned the list of names.

"He is so. He took the first share; but he does not wish his name to appear in print. They are all tip-top

men, you see—in fact, I would not have anything to do with it if it were not a thoroughly respectable affair."

"Of course not. I am quite sure of that, Mr. Sparrow. The price is a mere trifle compared with the advantages promised. I will decide at once to take the share, and I am very much obliged to you, I am sure."

"All right. Now the list is closed. You had better attend a meeting to-night, at eight o'clock, at Mr. Tubal's house, over the way."

"I will certainly try to attend. What is the meeting for?"

"To prepare a prospectus, and transact other business. It has been proposed to us by Mr. Jerry Buttons and his son Joseph (Tubal's friends at Oakey) that they unite with us, that is to say, they will put their rich, well developed claim of ten acres to our ten acres, and form the whole into one amalgamated company. They came down to Sydney last week with two tons of stuff from their claim ; one ton has been crushed at Mort's and the other at the Mint. We shall hear the results of the crushing to-night. Hush ! Somebody is coming up stairs. I think it is the official gentleman that I am expecting. You had better go. I will see you this evening. Good morning!"

Martin was punctual to a minute at the place of meeting at 8 o'clock, and he was formally introduced to his brother proprietors, who were all present except one. Mr. Buttons and his son Joseph were there also, in miners' costume ; and they looked, amidst the well-clad citizens, like two rusty harness buckles that had dropped into a lady's jewel casket by mistake. But though their

clothes were not superfine, and though their manners were simple and countryfied, they were treated with respect, for their claim's sake, and each brother shook hands with them tenderly, as he was introduced by Mr. Tubal. Mr. Buttons, sen., was a wiry, work-worn old man, with a contented-looking countenance, and a kind of perpetual, lucky-joy twinkle in his little grey eyes. He evidently anticipated that his hard-working days were over, and a life of luxurious ease was before him. His son was the exact model of his sire, and he seemed about the same age, or a trifle older, as seen by candle light, and as jolly, rough-and-ready a youth as ever said "gee woa" to a working bullock. He sat close beside his father, and his wide-awake expression seemed to say, "It's no use of you Sydney swells trying to swindle my old dad while his son Joe is at his elbow."

After a few minutes' social chat all round, during which everybody looked pleasant, Mr. Tubal was moved into the chair, and the business of the meeting began. The chairman gave a lucid account of his late visit to Oakey, and exhibited a corrected plan of his fortunate selection, drawn to a scale, and showing the breadth of the reefs to a nicety. He expressed his opinion of the claim in glowing language, which had a marked effect on his hearers, who all looked hopeful in the extreme. Mr. Buttons, sen., then gave his experienced opinion of his own ten-acre lot, and produced the official Mint and Mort's certificates of the recent trial crushings, showing an uniform $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. to the ton, at each machine. He stated that any quantity of stone could be got, of a similar yield, and his statement was promptly indorsed

by his son, who gravely added, "that you might dig night and day for ever without exhausting the reefs on their lot."

No doubt the intense interest manifested by so many respectable city gentlemen, influenced the opinions of both father and son respecting their own personal importance, and wonderfully exalted their views of the value of their mineral claim at Oakey. No other reasonable inference could be deduced from the growing confidence of the men, and the boldness of their demands and stipulations. The two buttons of gold—the product of their trial crushings—had a stimulating effect on their fancy ; it was, perhaps, the first gold they had handled from their claim, and they saw tons more in prospective. Their independent spirit so rapidly developed itself, that at one time Martin feared that the company would be dissolved before it was afloat, for the chairman began to wax warm with them, and they waxed warmer still, and a rowdy scene seemed imminent, when Mr. Sparrow—who was always considered clever at catching old birds with salt—interposed, and presently the high tone of the disputants softened down, and order and amiability were restored. Joe Buttons took his hat off again, winked at his father, and then resumed his seat.

It would never do to report all the discussions on that night. Some members were for floating the affair on a par with Paxton and Holman's ; others, of a more modest turn, thought that half their capital would do. The rash brother who said it was a monstrous absurdity to name such high figures, was severely snubbed by the chairman, and so was another brother who timidly suggested that

they should try to float for £10,000. Finally, it was carried by a majority that the capital shquld be £40,000, in 40,000 shares of £1 each; one-half of the shares, considered as fully paid up, was to be rateably divided amongst the promoters, and the other half was to be offered to the public at par. Out of the £20,000 which were to be raised by the sale of shares, each promoter was to receive £500 cash, and the balance was to go for working expenses. Mr. Sparrow—who was strong at figures—went into an extemporaneous calculation of the first year's profits, based on the product of the two trial crushings, and Mr. Joseph Button's estimate of the quantity of quartz that could be brought to grass every week. I forget the exact sum total which Mr. Sparrow arrived at, but it was thought to be encouraging enough to make all the shares go off like a shot. After all the heavy business was over, a lively chat ensued as to the name to be given to the new company; when, out of compliment to Joe Buttons, his own proposition was duly seconded and unanimously carried, that it be called, "The Siamese Twins Gold Quartz Company."

It was late when the meeting ended, but before they separated each of the brethren emphatically promised to do his part in making the company a grand success; and Joe Buttons further predicted that Tobin's Oakey would soon knock Hawkins' Hill into old bonnets.



CHAPTER VII.

MARTIN ASSISTS MRS. CARNEY TO INVEST HER LITTLE CAPITAL.

THE prolonged discussions of the evening were so exciting to Martin's brain, that after he retired to rest, he was as wakeful as an unhappy widower, with his three whooping coughing children in bed beside him. He could not sleep a wink, so he tried to divert the tedium by checking over Mr. Sparrow's calculations, of the first year's prospective profits of the Siamese Twins Gold Company. It was a difficult sum in mental arithmetic ; but Martin managed it, with the aid of his fingers and toes, and he found it to be correct to a shilling. After that was settled, he totted up, with the same digital help, the probable returns he would get from his Northern Bullseyes, and all his other mining specs ; and taking them at only two-thirds as much as the prospectus promised, the grand total showed him a net income of £3,140 a year, without counting the fees and private pickings of his directorship. It was certainly encouraging, though it was not satisfying, for Martin had more than half of his original capital still lying in the bank, unproductive (his

bank did not allow interest on current accounts). It would not do for him to rest contentedly with his work only half done ; but when he had safely invested all his money, he certainly would sit down quietly, and keep away from the noisy, business whirl of the city, for it did not agree with him. He made up his mind to that course ; for what would all the world be to a man if he could not sleep ? The matutinal crowing of two Chinese cocks, in his next door neighbour's yard, at length lulled him into a nap, just as daylight was first appearing.

He was much later than usual at the breakfast table ; but Mrs. Carney begged him not to apologise, for his time suited hers exactly. She had given her boys their porridge an hour ago, and sent them off to school. "I thought you might like a little fish this morning, sir, as you did not appear to have much appetite for bacon yesterday."

Martin thanked Mrs. Carney, and said he was fond of fish. He was touched with her kind thoughtfulness. He liked people about him to be tender-hearted and sympathizing ; though he did not like them to notice his ailments very closely. He sat down to breakfast with his comely landlady in quiet, for her prattling boys were away. For ten minutes or more, solemn silence ruled. Martin always considered it hazardous to converse while eating red bream, on account of the bones. Presently Mrs. Carney gave three short a-hem coughs, to clear away all embarrassment, and then said, "I hope you will not think I am taking too great a liberty, sir, in presuming to ask your advice in some of my pecuniary matters."

"My good lady, I shall be exceedingly pleased if my poor advice on any matter, can be of service to you. Pray do not talk of taking a liberty in speaking to me, at any time." Martin said it with honest fervour.

"You are very generous, I am sure, sir. I have not opened my lips to a single soul on the subject; but I seem to have confidence in your judgment, and I know you will advise me for the best. I must tell you, sir, that when poor dear Carney died, he left me this cottage and the shop at the corner, and a little money in the Savings Bank—not much, certainly, still I have found it handy. The shop is let for thirty-five shillings a week and taxes. Almost everybody tells me that it is worth more rent, but that is all I can get for it at present, and it is all the income I have had to support myself and my two dear boys until you came to lodge with me. Your thirty shillings a week, of course, has been a great help; I don't know how I should have got on without it, for things are dear now, and the boys wear out no end of boots. Now, sir, it has struck me that I might get along very much better if I were to borrow some money on my two houses and go into a few of these mines which are paying so extraordinarily well. It is hard for me to feel pinched when everyone around me is rolling in riches, you may say. How much a year do you think I ought to make out of £1000 nicely invested in mines? That is what I want to know first of all. If you can tell me that, I will explain to you what I think of doing."

"Hum—yes, I see, Ma'am. That is the first question. Well, it is rather hard to say exactly what you may rely upon in the way of dividends, for as far as my obser-

vation extends they are fluctuating. I do not mind telling you, in strict confidence, what I *expect* to make a year out of about £1,000 which I have invested in shares ; I have more capital to invest, but that is all I have safely placed up to last night. My calculations may possibly be wrong, but, considering that half of them were made by a gentleman of high official standing, and an expert at figures, I don't think I am very far out. Please to remember this is quite confidential, Ma'am ; I think I may safely expect to get £3,140 a year ; or, we'll say the even money, to make quite sure."

"Is it possible? You really astound me, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Carney, and she rolled her eyes wide open as she looked straight at Martin. He thought they were fine eyes—and she had good teeth too, which he observed as often as she smiled or looked astonished. "Three thousand a year, sir! What a handsome return for the investment of £1,000! Well, well! I have heard of many lucky hits amongst my friends and neighbours, but not anything to come up to yours, Mr. M'Tailing. Now, suppose I were to borrow £1,000 from the Mutual Provident Society, on security of my houses, do you think I could invest it in a similar way, sir?"

"It is hard to say, Ma'am ; but I am inclined to doubt it at the present moment. I consider that I have been peculiarly fortunate ; I have several sharp-sighted friends in the city who have helped me into my investments. I should never have done without their aid."

"I should be satisfied with much less than you will make, sir—say half as much—if I could insure it, or even

a third of that sum. £1,000 a year would keep me in very comfortable style."

"No doubt of it, Ma'am," replied Martin, while he rubbed his beard in an abstracted mood. Presently he said, "It has just occurred to me that you might consult with your cousin, Mr. Drench. He told me that he is in the way of hearing of good things every day."

"O dear, no, sir! I would not consult him for the world; he would certainly want to borrow the money from me himself. I know him of old." She paused a minute and sighed twice, and then she added in a softer key, "Perhaps I am wrong in seeking to alter my lot. It is right to be contented with it whatever it may be; but I do sometimes feel it hard that I should have to pinch and screw myself when I have perhaps, better means of making rich investments than some people have who have been lucky. A female friend of mine, who lives a few miles out of town, invested about £300 in gold mines a few weeks ago, and she told me only last night, that she expects to make at least £300 a year by her venture. A nice little sum that, as a supplement to her fixed income."

"May I ask if you have consulted with your trustees about mortgaging your houses, Mrs. Carney? For my part I dislike mortgages very much."

"Bless you, I have no trustees to consult, sir. Poor Carney had implicit confidence in me, and he left me every stick and stone he possessed, without any restriction whatever. He knew very well that I would take care of everything for the sake of our two dear boys; and he was quite right, for I love my children as I love my life."

"They are two fine boys, Ma'am. Remarkably fine boys, I may say."

"Yes, they certainly are, sir, though I say it. Two nicer-behaved, better dispositioned, and more clever, dutiful, obedient boys never stepped in shoe-leather. It is mainly for their sakes that I wish to increase my income, for I should like to give them a good education; and, though their poor father was only a saddler, I don't see why they shouldn't be gentlemen by-and-by."

"No reason whatever, Ma'am, except it be from their own opposition, which we need not anticipate. My idea is, Ma'am, that it is a refined mind and kindly manners that make the gentleman, and not merely money and fine clothes. A man may be a gentleman in a fustian coat and a leathern apron, or in a sailor's oilskin suit; in fact, I have known several mechanics and labouring men in this city who, although they have to work for their daily bread, have more real claim to the title of "gentleman" than some other citizens have, who ride in their coaches and live in grand style, but who seldom or never do or say anything that is useful to their fellow men around them. You need not be uneasy about the future position of your sons, Mrs. Carney, if you continue to train them up in the right way."

"That is just exactly as poor dear Carney used to talk, sir. You put me so much in mind of him, as I sit here and listen to you. He was a very sensible man, and a good man, too, sir. I miss him more and more every day of my life, for I have no relatives that I care to ask advice from on any important money matter; because, though they are nice enough in some ways, they

are very selfish and greedy for money. I have never had much experience in business affairs, for poor Carney managed everything, and he managed very well, as everybody knows, I was barely seventeen years of age when we were married, so I could not be expected to know much. We lived happily together for fifteen years; and I think I may truly say that we never had an angry word between us, and that's more than every married pair can say."

Those tender reminiscences began to excite Mrs. Carney to tears, so Martin considerately diverted her mind by going back to the subject of her contemplated investments.

"As I said before, Mrs. Carney, I do not like to see any one mortgage property, for it seems like bidding good-bye to it. Your houses cost your late husband years of labour to pay for, as you say, and I hope you will consider very seriously before you decide to borrow money upon them."

"I have considered the matter fully ; I have thought of it day and night, I may say, for the last fortnight, sir. I know I cannot be far wrong, for several persons in our society, very wise people too, have borrowed money on their little houses and have gone into mines which are sure and safe as the bank. One man, whom I knew very well, sold his life policy, about a month ago, and bought some copper shares which will be a certain fortune to him ; and our neighbour two doors off pawned his furniture to a broker for £50, and with that small sum he bought half a tip claim somewhere near Tenterfield, and now he would not sell it for £1000."

"I have no doubt those are all authentic examples of good fortune, Mrs. Carney. I could tell you of many exciting cases which have come under my own notice. One old gentleman, for instance, with only a few hundred pounds to spare, went boldly into copper, and he now owns shares which are valued at £5,000. These are tantalizing times for persons who have capital unoccupied, or that is yielding them only simple interest. I really cannot wonder at you being anxious to speculate a little in the share market, like all the rest of the folks, high and low, around us."

"Just so, sir. As a lone woman I think it is my duty to do the best I can for myself and family. I am told that either the Mutual Provident or the Savings' Bank will lend money at 6 per cent. That would be £60 a-year] for the loan of £1,000 ; so if I only got £300 a-year by my dividends, you see I should clear £240 ; but, of course, I expect to get a vast deal more. If you will be good enough to advise me what shares to buy, I shall be very much obliged to you, sir."

"I did not mean to go into town to-day on my own business, but I will go in and see every broker I know, and get the best information I can for you. Pray act cautiously, my dear Mrs. Carney, whatever you do."

"I mean to act cautiously, sir ; and I will not do anything without first consulting *you*, as *you* have been kind enough to offer me your advice and help."

Martin went into town by the next omnibus, and a busy time he had of it amongst the brokers and private speculators. He returned home at tea time, looking quite jaded, with his pockets full of mining prospectuses.

After the boys had been sent to bed, he sat down with Mrs. Carney and read over as many of the prospectuses as they could get through by midnight ; and the conclusion they unanimously came to was, not to invest in a hurry, but to be exceedingly careful, for " all that glittered was not gold."

It would be tiresome to tell of all Martin's exertions that week, in the cause of the widow and her fatherless children. He performed the friendly duty he had undertaken with a diligence, and zeal, and caution far exceeding what he had shown when he was investing his own money, which was quite right. For five successive days he lived and moved in the very centres of the mining circles, at the street corners and elsewhere ; and his ears were always eager for every little scrap of mining news that was afloat. No Colonial Treasurer ever thought more intensely over his new budget than Martin did over the investment of the widow's money. He certainly used his best judgment in advising her, and the result was, that she bought 100 Peak Down Copper shares, at £6, cum dividend ; three promoters' shares in Northern Bullseye (copper), at £80 each (representing 900 paid-up shares, and 300 contributors' shares, £1 each) ; and 185 Rapps (gold) at 22s., the only parcel in the market to be had at the price. All these shares were sworn to be cheap, and all certain to rise. Martin might have advised her to go into other concerns, which promised far larger returns ; but he thought it was best for her to be on the safe side. What she wanted was a good permanent investment ; and at a low estimate the dividends would yield her £600 a year, which was not so bad. Mrs.

Carney promised to be quite satisfied with that income ; she seemed as grateful to Martin for the trouble he had taken as if he had jumped into the sea and saved her life. She got £1,000 from the Mutual Provident Society, and the small balance she had in the Savings' Bank added to it just paid for all her shares, and a pound to spare. The only calls she was subject to were on her 300 contributors' shares in the Northern Bullseye, and the calls for interest on her mortgage ; but the forthcoming dividend in her Peak Downs would fill her purse to overflowing. She considered herself a lucky woman ; and Martin felt in his heart—the satisfaction which every generous man experiences after doing his utmost to help a needy fellow-creature.





CHAPTER VIII.

MR. M'TAILING GOES LARGEY INTO TIN.



T was but natural that Martin should feel elated at the promising result of his week's exertions in the interests of the widow and her family. Every one enjoys success. It was pleasing, also, for him to observe the genuine gratitude of Mrs. Carney, as it manifested itself not in words merely, which cost no effort, but in various little kind ministrations to his personal comfort. Gratitude was a virtue, which he had found to be very rare in his prosperous days of yore. Her sons, too, had evidently been newly instructed in their duty to their benefactor, who had done so much towards making them independent gentlemen by-and-by, and their increased veneration for Martin was too marked to escape his special notice. No doubt the box of figs and the half-crowns which he had on two lucky days last week slipped into their hands, had some influence on their respectful bearing towards him, for boys in general like such liberal donors. At any rate, they suddenly began to put on their very best behaviour, and to forget their slang words

altogether. They left off noisily imitating the whistling organ boys before his bedroom window in early morning ; and they never repeated the nasty practical jokes of putting live garden slugs inside his boots, or of priming his shower-bath with chimney-soot.

Martin had told their mother that they were remarkably fine boys, which was correct enough, physically considered, but they were not favourites with him, because they were intolerably noisy boys, not at all obedient to him, and as full of mischievous tricks as a couple of circus monkeys. But after the pleasing change in their demeanour, he got to like them better, for he was always fond of well-behaved children, and in the kindness of his nature he volunteered to give them evening lessons in Latin and mathematics, for which offer he received a further outpouring of thanks from his grateful landlady.

Martin's mining transactions for the past week had been on Mrs. Carney's account exclusively. He held strongly to the principle that to do a thing well you must give it your undivided attention ; and he had at the first outset determined that he would not wittingly give himself cause for future self-reproach on the score of inattention to the trust he had undertaken. Therefore, he declined numberless solicitations to operate on his own account ; but he, from day to day, dotted down in his note-book certain investments which commended themselves to his judgment ; and now that his mind was again free to act for himself, he began seriously to consider what he should go into next that promised to turn one pound into two or three.

He had no doubt at all that gold was the handiest metal a man could possess in a civilized community. From its portable nature, there was less trouble with gold-dust than with copper or tin ore ; besides, it was convertible into cash in a minute, at a standard rate, and there was little or no expense for cartage. At the same time, he could not wholly get over certain misgivings as to the risk he ran, as an absentee proprietor, of not getting his due share of the proceeds of the gold from the mines in which he had invested, for gold miners are but men—erring, mortal men. True enough, as honest Mr. Drench put it to him, a righteous man would not misappropriate the weight of a pin's head in any metal : but, after roughly estimating the number of gold companies in the colony at that present time afloat or trying to float, to be nearly 500, he had grave doubt if there were 500 righteous men, of that particular calling, in the land to fill the offices of mining managers to the said companies, to say nothing of the risk there seemed to be in allowing hired labourers to work day and night in the deep gold mines, with pockets in their trousers. He would have blushed to mention his misgivings in a public assembly, or even as a director at a Board meeting, for he hated anything that savoured of a mean, suspicious nature ; still, in the calm seclusion of his chamber, in the night watches, when his reflecting faculties were most collected, he could not but confess to himself that there was a risk, almost amounting to a dead certainty, of being robbed right and left. Under these considerations, he therefore made up his mind that he would give the preference to the heavier metals in his future operations, for he wished

to live a quiet life, and not to be harrassed with qualms about the certainty of his income.

Tin is a metal that is not easily pocketed by servants when smelted into ingots, or even when securely stitched up in No. 2 canvas bags. The price in London was at that time high, and it was likely to be higher, for Martin had been told at Greville's that the tin mines in Cornwall had suddenly run out ; but whether that report was true or not, there was but little danger of not finding a market for the ore, large as was the quantity which our northern mountains and gullies contained. He resolved to go into tin. He had seen a prospectus of the Great Inverell Tin Company, than which nothing could be more inviting. He meant to go boldly into that spec as soon as he had done Mrs. Carney's business : but, unfortunately, he was a day too late for shares at first hand. That aristocratic concern was floated in a twinkling, and the shares went up immediately, like fireworks. It was really marvellous how quickly that gigantic company got under way ; but it just shows the value of good names on the provisional directors' list, and the advantage of having mining surveyors who knew what they were about. Though their selections took a zigzag course for several miles, right through the heart's core of the tin country, they were quite straightforward in a moral sense. Of course the prospectuses did not reveal the mysterious process by which the buried lodes had been so definitely traced through all their sinuosities, but they showed a ground plan of the allotments, like the red squares on a chess-board, with lodes upon lodes of tin, of the purest quality, marked as plainly as possible all through them. Some

persons, who were a long way behind in their knowledge of mineralogical science, opined that the selectors must have had supernatural smelling powers, or have possessed a sort of magnetic divining rod ; others declared that the directors had borrowed the key to the occult art, by which Heller, the wizard, used to catch sovereigns like flying moths. Without deigning to notice any more of the diabolical insinuations that were current amongst disappointed jobbers, whose applications for shares had been rejected, I may simply repeat that the list was closed before Martin had decided to operate, which was a silent admonition to him on the necessity for more prompt action in such active times.

Mr. Blocks, the broker, had always shown an accommodating disposition ; and, moreover, he was a shrewd man, who meditated day and night on the share lists—so Martin went into town specially to consult him again. Mr. Blocks politely listened while Martin expounded his views on the greater security of the heavy ores as investments, and hinted his forebodings that gold miners might be tempted to pick and steal little odd nuggets. As soon as he paused, Mr. Blocks replied, manfully, “I grant you, Mr. M’Tailing, that there is some degree of force in what you say. There doubtless is a difficulty in finding honest men enough to work *all* the gold mines that are being opened, and it is feared that some of the gold companies will collapse on that account ; but you will excuse me for saying that I think you are disposed to take a morbid view of human rectitude in this advanced age. If your ideas were generally accepted, how would the affairs of the world be managed, think you ? If man’s

trust in his fellow-men were disturbed, I ask, where would be our Mint, our flourishing banks, our civic institutions, our grand jewellers' shops ? Er—er—er—in short, sir, allow me to add, without offence, it is an absurd crotchet of yours, which you had better get rid of or it will make you wretched for life. I am happy to say that I could find you a score or two of men in this city to-day who are worthy to take the management of any gold company afloat ; and let me further say, in support of any company that I am personally connected with, that I usually select men as managers more on account of their moral probity than their mining experience. Honesty is the main quality in my estimation ; the art of gold mining can be learnt in a fortnight.” Mr. Blocks then added, in a softened tone, “ Never fear, Mac, my boy ! There will be gold enough in the Wattle Dabster to pay you and me, and all of us, a fat dividend every now and then for fifty years, even if the common miners should fob a little dust occasionally to buy a bit of 'bacca. As for our mining manager, I will guarantee that he would not steal a penny loaf if he were starving, and his hungry wife and children were making ready to eat him. He is the very marrow of honesty.”

Martin seemed to be quite reassured by the powerful reasoning of Mr. Blocks, and they went into a lengthy discussion on the merits of tin.

“ I am sorry you are too late for the ‘ Inverell Company,’ old fellow, for it is something high above the common run of tin things. I could, perhaps, get you a few hundred shares at eighteenpence advance, but I do not like to advise you to buy contributors’ shares at a

premium, when you may [go into good safe things at first hand. By the bye, I know of something in tin just now that is quite equal to the Inverell Company, as far as the respectability of its proprietors are concerned ; and I am told that it is a remarkably rich claim. I saw a telegram the other day, from the manager of an adjacent claim to the legal manager in Sydney, requesting ten thousand tin bags to be sent up immediately. That looks like active business, doesn't it ? ”

“ Yes, it certainly does, Blocks. What is the name of the claim you think I may be able to buy into ? ”

“ The Tabernacle Hill Tin Company, Limited.”

“ O yes ; I saw that advertised a few weeks ago, and I judged it to be safe and sound, because Mr. Balmain was the broker. I intended to see about it, but it has escaped my memory until this moment.”

“ Just so, Mac. But Mr. Balmain is not the broker for the Tabernacle Hill now, so you need not go to him about it. If you do go, he will be sure to tell you as he has told others, that he has no confidence in the concern. As far as I learn, he has been rather stiff with the proprietors, and they did not like it, for they are all men of consequence. He was not pushing off the shares in the spirited manner they thought he ought to have done ; and when they remonstrated with him about it, he coolly withdrew his floating influence, and said he declined to have anything more to do with the company. But he returned all the money he had received for shares to the persons who bought them from him.”

“ That was certainly quite right and honest, Blocks.”

“ Right and honest ! I scarcely think it was quite

right to the proprietors. They surely ought to have had some part of the money, to pay expenses. I would not have returned the whole. However, we will not argue about that. The ten proprietors have resolved to work the claim themselves, and keep all their profits. They have sent up a manager, who will engage a squad of navvies immediately. I know one of the partners, who would sell you half his share for £250, if you like to say the word promptly."

"Is it a good thing? That's the question, Blocks."

"Good! I believe you! There are 140 acres, equal in richness to any tin-bearing land in that famous locality. So the prospectus reads; and further says, that four men can take out a ton of pure tin per week. Now, if four men can raise one ton, it is clear that forty men could raise ten tons of ore a week. Would you not call that good?"

"Yes, indeed, that would do nicely," said Martin, rubbing his hands.

"To tell you the truth, Mac, I have more faith in the permanency of tin than I have in any other minor metal; and so have many other far-seeing men amongst us. It was only yesterday that I heard of a gentleman, who certainly possesses one of the longest scientific heads in this land, and who perhaps knows 'the time o' day' ten times better than the celebrated Sam Slick—he threw up a lucrative appointment in Sydney to go into tin, and started a few days ago for his newly-bought claim in New England. He will be his own working manager, so of course he will have every chance of getting all he can find, and with his mechanical science vigorously thrown

into his shovel he will go at it like a game cock picking up pearl barley. I'll warrant there won't be many grains of tin left for the Chinese fossickers when he has done with his claim."

"Do you think the first selectors of Tabernacle Hill were men of science, Blocks?"

"I cannot say that they were. But science is not so necessary to a mere *selector*, as keen eyesight and general "nous." No doubt they knew a tin pot from a copper kettle before they set out on their prospecting tour; but they could not make a mistake when they saw the ruby tin ore lying all over the ground, like rats' dirt in a granary. How long would it take any fool to tell grains of tin from gravel stones, think you?"

"Why, no time at all. Decidedly not."

"Very well. They went on the ground. They saw the ore in galores, and they rejoiced over it. They telegraphed to Sydney, and the claim was secured. All as simple as a pinch of snuff, you see. By the bye, Mac, as you have lots of time on your hands, you might do a rare stroke in the tin selecting line, now everybody is so amazingly hot after that metal. What do you say about starting off at once for the New England Mountains, and making a few selections before they are all gone? I will go snacks with you; and I'll guarantee that any claim you may take up, and strongly recommend, will float like a cork jacket, as you are now well known in the mining market as a capitalist of unimpeachable character."

"I could not conveniently leave town on any errand for the next month, Blocks."

"Ah, then it will be no go. We cannot expect this unprecedented fury for shares of all sorts to continue much longer, for buyers will soon have spent all their money ; in fact, some of them are now beginning to buy upon bills at four months. We must give that scheme up, Mac ; but what do you say about this offered half share in the Tabernacle Hill proprietary claim ?"

"I will take it, Blocks, on your judgment ; and I think you may buy me 400 shares in the Great Inverell Tin, limited, if you can get them at eighteenpence premium."

"All right, old fellow. I'll go and secure the Inverells immediately, for I dare say they will be up sixpence higher to-morrow. I can leave the Tabernacle Hill till after dinner." Away went Blocks on his errand ; but he returned to his office in two minutes, and said in an excited key, "I say, Mac, there is a telegram just come down from Trunkey, with news that the Victorian Twankay claim has struck a thick vein of water. It is considered a capital sign. By all means go into that, Mac, if there are any shares to be picked up."





CHAPTER IX.

MARTIN CANNOT BUY INTO THE VICTORIAN TWANKAY CRUSHING COMPANY.

MHILE Mr. Blocks was gone to buy the Inverell Company tin shares, Martin thought he would go and pick up a little information, in an indirect way, about the Victorian Twankay; so he sauntered into Greville's long room, which was crowded as usual with buyers and sellers of shares of all sorts, and all trying their utmost to make money.

As he now and then asked a question respecting the mine he was then most interested in, he tried to put on the jaunty indifference of a keen horse-jobber at an auction, who is secretly intent on buying a buggy hock that has struck his fancy. But Martin could get but very little information about the Victorian Twankay, further than a reference to the recent telegram about the watery vein. Some of the gentlemen laughed at his queries, and seemed to think he was only joking in a quiet way; others suspected that he was dodging, or trying to rig the market, in order to help some unlucky friend to sell out. One facetious young man said he did not know where to get any Victorian Twankays, but he knew where there

were some Brazilian monkeys which were lively stock to hold if caught by their tails. Another funny fellow said that if Martin was anxious to go into a water claim, he would sell him part of a lagoon on the Hastings River, with all rights and privileges.

It soon appeared clear to him that the Victorian Twankay shares were not on the market, and that fact seemed to favour Mr. Blocks' opinion that they were worth looking after. He had an hour to spare, so he went direct to Mr. Drench's office, and throwing off his assumed indifferent air, he asked that gentleman, in plain terms, to give him his professional opinion respecting the value of that company's property.

"As I said before, Mr. M'Tailing, I shall be happy to give you any information I can about anything, but this is a rather difficult question to answer in a minute." Mr. Drench smiled quizzically, then took a pinch of snuff, and added, "Please to take a seat, and I will tell you all I know about this very peculiar company, confidentially of course, for you know it is not safe to speak openly about the hobbies of moneyed men. The truth is, the Victorian Twankey is a pet concern of some half-a-dozen wealthy gentlemen in Sydney, who really know no more about practical mining than I do, though they are sagacious enough in their own lines of trade. They have bought up all the shares amongst themselves, and I doubt if any of them would sell out at any price, for they are all of opinion that they will find a regular mint by and bye. They have splendid machinery on the ground, and they are proud of it. It is kept in fine order, for they have a first-class engineer, and everything is span new,

and as shiny as drawing-room tongs. So it ought to be shiny, we may say, for it has never done any work, except a few odd jobs at grist-crushing and smashing up a few tons of their own surface stone, by way of practice."

"Never done any work! How is that?" asked Martin.

"Well, in the first place, you see, sir, the engine is too far from the shaft to be of any service in pumping, so they have to bale out the water in primitive style."

"But how came they to erect the engine so far from its work?"

"That looks like a serious blunder, to be sure; but I will explain everything as well as I know how, and then you will be able to see how the affair stands at present, as well as anybody else can. The claim of several acres at Twankay was, I have been told, taken up in the first instance by a few enterprising Melbourne citizens, who had had large experience in floating operations of various kinds. 'Cute fellows some of those Victorian speculators are, sure enough! The first thing they did after pegging out their claim was to make a grand noise about its virtues; then they erected a very powerful engine, with stupendous crushing apparatus all complete—in short, it was the most costly machinery of the kind that has ever been erected on this side of the continent. It came from Melbourne direct, and cost several thousands of pounds, laid down on the ground, before the engine-house was built. Beautiful machinery it was to look at, as one of the present owners has often told me, with glints of lucky pride shimmering all over his honest face."

"But was it not premature to get such expensive machinery before they had opened the ground, or got any work for the engine to do?"

"It looks like it to me now, sir ; and I dare say other persons have formed that opinion. But those acute projectors knew what they were about. Trust them for that ! Sydney boys would follow a Punch and Judy showman if he was to carry his show down to Coogee beach, and men are very like boys in some things. You see what I mean ? A company was formed, called in honour of the bold projectors, "The Victorian Twankay Gold Company," and the shares sold like fresh fish, for the mere description of the engine was enough to tempt any one to buy, let alone the rich promises that the prospectuses were cram full of. Nobody could suspect that experienced Melbourne men would erect such gigantic crushing power, without having a certain prospect of lots of stuff to operate upon ; and there was a rush for shares immediately. Several persons whom I know, fretted a good deal because they were too late with their applications. After showing the local miners how to go to work to get the gold, the Melbourne men went back to their own country, jolly enough, no doubt, for they had made a profitable trip of it. By and bye, many of the smaller shareholders naturally grew tired of paying calls for nothing, so their shares were forfeited, in accordance with an equitable bye-law. Eventually the whole concern got, by fair and honest purchase, into the hands of these few rich Sydney gentlemen, and they were all determined to develop it, for they solemnly believe their claim is as full of reefs as Torres Straits, and that they are sure to

cut some of them if they only dig deep enough. They have been sinking shafts and money for I don't know how long, and all they have found up to the present time is water and mud, but they are perfectly satisfied. A plucky lot of citizens are they ! Game to the back-bone, as the saying is. I am told that the shaft is full of water now ; but the owners are all as rejoiced at the fact as if they had tapped an oil spring. They sent up a hundred new iron buckets yesterday, and telegraphed to the engineer to 'bale out day and night.' It is reported that some of the rollicking miners cannot fill the buckets for laughing, and the water is gaining ground. But that is only a city yarn, and you must not notice it. The mining manager would not stand any nonsense, for he is dead certain of cutting King Arthur's Reef when he gets down seventy-one fathoms. That is all I can tell you about the Twankay Company, sir. I need not warn you not to go into it at present, for none of the proprietors would sell a single share, if you were to go crying for it. Their faith is wonderful !"

"So it appears," said Martin, with a smile. "Now, can you tell me anything about the Brownman's Reef Gold Company, Mr. Drench? I am expecting Mr. Spring, the manager, to call on me this evening about a promoter's share in it. He seems very anxious to get me as a director."

"Aye, I shouldn't wonder. Well, it strikes me, Mr. M'Tailing, that the Brownman's Reef Company are going to follow the example of the Victorian Twankay projectors—that is, to put machinery upon the ground before they know what is under the surface. I hear that they

have given Russell and Co. an order for an engine and stampers, and all the rest of it, and the Company is not formed yet. It may be true, as you say, that Mr. Spring is a well-meaning man ; but we have proofs enough every day that upright men are apt to make mistakes. Be careful. Don't invest in anything that has not been proved. That is the best advice I can give you. Money in your pocket is better than owning shares in a mountain of dirt in some out-of-the-way wilderness."

After thanking Mr. Drench for his advice and information, Martin hastened back to Blocks' office, and found that that active gentleman had secured 400 Inverell Tin Company's shares, at eighteen-pence premium ; but he was only just in time, for there were no more to be had under two shillings, and they were certain to rise higher. Mr. Blocks further confirmed Mr. Drench's opinion as to the utter hopelessness of trying to buy Victorian Twankays from the present spirited owners. The sudden flooding of their mine had made them firmer than ever, and they were convinced to a man that, when the water was baled out, they would find that the source of the spring, was a rich gold reef. " But I heard of something in copper while I was out, that I think you may keep your eye on, Mac," continued Blocks, with a sagacious wink at his speculative client. " I was in at M'Cullum's office for a few minutes, and I saw there a gentleman from the Braidwood district, with a carpet-bag full of rich copper specimens, which he got from a claim he has lately taken up, and called the Nulla Nulla. M'Cullum wants him to form a promoters' company immediately, but he is not in a hurry about it, for he has

had some talk with Alexander Coppras, who is going up in a day or two to see the claim. If Mr. Coppras decides to take a half share in it, you may be safe to go into it strongly, Mac, for there is not a keener judge of mineral land in the colony than that same gentleman, and everybody knows he is a first-rate mark."

"Do you know where the claim is situated?"

"Not exactly, Mac. From the owner's candid admission, the position of the mine is discouraging at first sight, being at the bottom of a gully 1,000 feet deep, with no other outlet or inlet than a natural watercourse. Still, the position of a good thing doesn't matter much when the market is lively, as it is now. Egad! only prove to me that rich copper ore exists, and I'll engage to float it into a company, even if it lay at the bottom of Middle Harbour. But I say, old fellow, it is a thousand pities you did not go into Peak Downs a month or two ago. They are up to £7 this morning, and they are safe to go up to £10 after the dividend is paid."

"Do you really think so, Blocks?"

"I do indeed. I only wish I had money to spare; I would operate immediately. You know Lorrie, don't you?"

"I know him slightly. I have often met him in the mining circles lately; in fact, I think he is one of our Northern Bullseye promoters."

"Just so. He is in lots of good things. A real lucky fellow, and a deserving man, too. He had all his capital invested at the simple current rate of interest, so he drew it in and put it into shares; and I know he could sell out at this very hour for £30,000, or more."

"Dear me ! That is encouraging, sure enough ! What shares did he invest in, do you know?" There was a tinge of envy in Martin's look, as he spoke, though he was wholly unconscious of it.

"A few choice things in gold, but principally copper. He has a great many Peak Downs, and he is holding out for £10. He will get it, too, as sure as his name is Lorrie."

"You would consider the Peak Downs a solid investment for me, at £7."

"Solid as hatters' blocks. No mistake about them. If you have a chance of getting any at that price jump at it. That's my advice, Mac."

* * * * *

Martin's cogitations as he walked homeward that evening were somewhat of a conflicting character. He could not but feel satisfied at his purchase of 400 Inverells at sixpence below the present market value ; but he was a little put out at not being able to get into the Victorian Twankay, and still more grieved that he had not bought 200 Peak Downs for himself, while he was buying for his landlady. However, the consideration that he had made an undoubtedly good investment for the widow and her fatherless boys helped to console him, and there were no traces of chagrin on his countenance when he rapped at her cottage door at Redfern.



CHAPTER X.

A RISE IN PEAK DOWNS. MARTIN'S LANDLADY SHOWS EXTREME GRATITUDE.

MHEN Martin entered his home he found a fire burning brightly in the drawing-room, and a little round table drawn up close to an easy chair, upon which his tea was laid out as temptingly as possible. Mrs. Carney softly explained that, in consequence of her having a friend in the dining-room who had unexpectedly dropped in to take tea with her, she had taken the liberty of getting him his tea by himself in the drawing-room. "She is an intolerably chatty body," added Mrs. Carney, with a shrug, "and I know you like to be quiet, especially after you have had a long day in town."

Martin thanked his landlady for her kind attention to his comfort, and soon afterwards he sat down to his solitary meal in peace, and poured out tea for himself from a sterling silver tea-pot which he had not seen in use before. It was a real cosy little room ; not like some drawing-rooms, which are so cram full of fragile ornaments of all kinds, that one is scarcely able to turn round without a fidgetty fear of knocking over and

smashing something. It was a room that seemed to be adapted for use as well as for show. It had a nice rationally-shaped sofa in it, that a weary body could stretch upon comfortably, and it was covered with washable anti-maccassars, the handiwork of Mrs. Carney. It had also two genuine easy chairs ; not stiff-stuffed trumpery concerns that would make a man's back ache to look at—and all the other furniture matched the sofa and chairs. It had a solid-looking bronze fender, that Martin did not hesitate to put his slippers feet upon without dread of bending it out of shape or tilting it over to cut his shins. There was a full length oil picture of the late Mr. Carney, and a similar portrait of Mrs. Carney on one side of the wall, and several good old-fashioned engravings in other parts of the room. There were long red moreen curtains drawn across the French windows to keep out draughts. There was a looking-glass over the chimney-piece and a marble clock in the centre which would go. Altogether it was as snug a little room as any home-loving old bachelor ever sat in. Martin quite admired it, and really wished he could have his tea there every evening ; for he enjoyed quietude after a day's business excitement, and the boys were sometimes very unruly, notwithstanding their new resolve to behave themselves like thorough-bred young gentlemen.

Judith was just clearing Martin's tea-table, after he had finished his meal, when there was a rap at the door, and Mr. Spring was announced. He had come on purpose to induce Martin to buy a promoter's share in the Brownman's Reef Gold Company, so he lost no time in stating his errand. His arguments and pleadings were of the

common kind, which almost everybody was familiar with during the mining rage, so I need not report them. After listening to his wordy account of the extreme richness of the reef, the inexhaustibleness of its auriferous stone, and the certainty of prodigious returns after the engine had got fairly to work, Martin replied—

“I have almost made up my mind, Mr. Spring, that I will not buy any more gold shares. I have had pressing invitations to go into not less than three hundred gold companies during the last six weeks, in some of which I was offered a large number of paid-up shares merely to allow my name to be advertised in the list of provisional directors. Nearly all of those concerns were declared to be as promising as your company is; but I declined every offer with the exception of four or five, which I feel satisfied are undoubtedly safe, and the promoters of them are men of honour and good judgment.”

“There is not a better mine in the colony than the Brownman’s Reef, and not a safer lot of men on any directory. I will guarantee that.”

“Your guarantee is re-assuring, to some extent, Mr. Spring; still, you must forgive me if I hesitate. I had a little insight into mining affairs in Victoria, a few years back; not that I speculated in shares myself, for I needed all my capital in my business, but many personal friends of mine went more or less extensively into gold shares, and I think I may say that the majority of them were serious losers. The recollection of their mishaps has tended to make me very cautious, during these unprecedented times of mining enterprise. It would be a serious thing to me, were I to lose the little capital I have.”

"I would die sooner than advise you to go into anything that I did not believe you would gain by, Mr. M'Tailing."

"Yes, William ; I do not doubt your good intentions towards me ; still, it is possible you may be mistaken in your estimate of the richness of your claim. Although you say you have seen thousands of tons of stone on it, it may be as free from gold as the rubble in the Pyrmont quarries. Mistakes like that have been made in Victoria."

"But we have had a trial crushing of some of the worst of the stone, and it went over an ounce to the ton. We intend to crush the stone, dirt and all, and I believe we shall find that it is all highly auriferous."

"By that course of crushing you will stand a fair chance of getting all the gold there is in the claim, certainly. But who is your mining manager? Will his knowledge of mining warrant you in adopting such an expensive process ? "

"I shall be mining manager, myself," said Mr. Spring, proudly.

"You have been a farmer nearly all your lifetime, William ; so you cannot possibly have had much experience in gold mining. I presume you know nothing at all about the actual work of a miner."

"That knowledge is easily picked up, sir. I dare say I know as much about it as nine-tenths of the mining managers in this colony."

"That is probable enough, Spring ; and it is one reason why I have not any faith in nine-tenths of the companies afloat. How people in their senses can risk their money in the way they are doing every day is a

wonder to me. It is a general infatuation, such as I never saw the like of in the maddest days of mining speculation in Victoria. No doubt there is plenty of gold in the country, but I do not believe that half a score of the companies now afloat are going the right way to get it, in payable quantities. I have much more confidence in copper and tin, and I intend to place all the money I have left in good safe mines, as a permanent investment."

"Then I can tell you where you may go into something very rich in copper, at first hand. I know of two rich claims, neither of which have yet been taken up. Two companies might easily be floated, if you were to go into the scheme with spirit."

"In what part of the country are the claims situated?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you. One is not far from the rich Peelwood Mine, and the other is at Hungry Hill, on the Williams River."

"Hungry Hill is not a happy name for a rich copper claim," said Martin, smiling.

"Never mind the ugly name, so long as plenty of copper is there; and there is no mistake about that fact. I am told it is a mountain of ore; and it could be tunnelled out at a mere trifling cost."

"How do you know that, Spring?"

"I had the information from a gentleman who was told of it by an old resident in the district, a real sagacious gentleman, up to all sorts of legitimate science. He has been out prospecting lately, and found rich copper specimens in several places on the Williams River."

"The reported discoveries, from day to day, of mineral wealth in various parts of this country, is really astounding," remarked Martin, and he threw himself back in his chair, like a man struck stiff with astonishment. "Metals will surely become super-abundant in the market, if only half the mines now opening up should turn out a quarter of the weight of ore they are estimated to contain within their hidden depths."

Mr. Spring curtly muttered, "No fear!"

After a few minutes' silent cogitation, Martin said in a very firm tone, "Well, William, I will consider over your propositions; and if I decide in favour of either of them, I will let you know in a day or two."

Mr. Spring, like all other mine discoverers of the day, was not easily put off with a negative. He stayed another hour descanting on the distinctive merits of Brownman's Reef and Hungry Hill; but finding that Martin was determined not to go into any new speculation that evening, he took his departure. Martin felt relieved when his visitor had gone. He was beginning to be nauseated with the continued twaddle about rich reefs, splendid lodes, first-rate crushings, rare specs, capital chances, and other trade jargon of share sellers, which his ears had been dinned with almost every day for several weeks past, and he longed for a little peace and quietude. He was almost resolved to go into town the next day, and invest all his remaining capital in Peak Downs, if he could get them for £7; and then he should have done with the share market, and would settle down contentedly and wait for his incoming dividends. In the meantime, he might amuse himself for an hour or two on

fine mornings, in trimming up the widow's little back garden, which was getting overrun with weeds, and he could resume his old favourite study of dynamics in the afternoon, and teach the widow's sons in the evenings.

He felt it was delightsome to be quiet ; and then he sat for some time conjuring up fanciful pictures of future days of home happiness. " Heigho ! what a pretty little snug room this is !" he whispered to himself. " Everything so clean and natty, and so substantial withal. Mrs. Carney is certainly an excellent manager ; and her late husband was not a bad judge of comfortable house furniture, though his picture up there shows a dull, stupid-looking face. I should like to buy just such a cosy little cottage for myself, and furnish it precisely in this style. I think I will do it too, by and bye, after I have cleared off all my old debts of conscience in Melbourne."

The remembrance of Melbourne aroused old lingering thoughts of his faithless Charlotte, and he sighed again as he muttered, " How pleasant it would be to have a loving wife sitting in that opposite arm-chair ; or, nicer still, to be sitting tenderly on my knee. Had Charlotte not proved herself unworthy of my devotedness, how cheerily we could have got on together, with plenty of money to spend ! But she cruelly cast me off in my days of adversity, and she shall never share in my prosperity. No, never ! Ah, me ! I fear I am growing too old to win a wife—but—tush !—I won't encourage that stupid notion. I hear, now and then, of men marrying at seventy years old, and I am only forty-eight—in my prime, I may say." Just then there was a gentle tap at the drawing-room door. Martin said in a pleasant tone, " Please to come in,"

when in walked his landlady, dressed very smartly, in honour of her evening visitor, no doubt.

"Pray excuse me for disturbing you, sir, but I was afraid your fire might be going out."

"Thank you, Mrs. Carney, I have had a nice fire all the evening; but I was just thinking of going to bed. Pray come in, ma'am; you are not disturbing me, I assure you; indeed, I am very glad you are come." Mrs. Carney sat down in the vacant easy chair, as Martin was speaking, and he thought she really looked very genteel in her new blue silk dress with fringe trimmings. "My visitor has this moment gone home," she said, with a smile which indicated a peculiar kind of gladness. "I was obliged to send the boys to bed an hour ago, so she had to go to the railway station alone. Serves her right for stopping so late."

"O dear me! why did you not tell me, my dear madam. I would have seen the lady to the train with pleasure."

"I did not like to trouble you, sir. The truth is, Miss Ready is a terrible talker, and that is the reason why I gave you your tea by yourself this evening. She would have made your head ache, I am sure."

Mrs. Carney had other reasons for isolating her lodger for the evening. Let innocent landladies censure her policy. Miss Ready was a smart spinster, not over young to marry, and with money and lands of her own. Mrs. Carney suspected that she had designedly dropped in to tea that evening on purpose to be introduced to Mr. M'Tailing, and to consult him about investing some of her spare money in mining shares. Mrs. Carney was not going to run a tremendous risk of losing her lodger,

so she kept a partition wall between him and the speculating spinster. But Martin had no suspicion of his landlady's secret motives and feelings, so he politely repeated his regret, that she should have hesitated to make use of him, in time of need. Mrs. Carney said she was very much obliged to him, she was sure ; and then there was a rather embarrassing silence for a minute.

"Stay a little while, if you please, ma'am ; I have a few words to say to you," said Martin, as Mrs. Carney modestly rose up to go away. Her big eyes brightened up again, and she looked joyfully anxious for what was coming next.

"I am happy to say, ma'am, that the Peak Downs were £7 to-day in the market, and they may be up to £8 to-morrow."

"O, Mr. M'Tailing ! What a happy piece of news ! Then I shall make £200 clear by my hundred shares, to begin with," exclaimed Mrs. Carney, looking intensely glad. "What *can* I say to thank you enough for all your kindness to me and mine ?"

Martin's knees knocked with sheer nervousness, and he stammered out, while he lighted his bedroom candle, "Pray don't say anything at all, my dear Mrs. Carney ! The knowledge that I have been of service to you is reward enough, twice over. Don't thank me, please ma'am. I would rather not. You are quite welcome to my services at any time."

"Kind, excellent man !" exclaimed the widow, with one of the most expressive looks possible. "I shall thank you in my life actions, and shall ever teach my

dear sons to regard you as their very best friend and benefactor."

"Ye—ye yes, ma'am—two fine boys—hem—ah—I am afraid it is getting late. I will wish you good night."

Martin held out his hand, and the widow gave it a grateful grasp, which sent a peculiar tingle all the way up from his finger tips to his heart's centre, and down again to his shaking knees.





CHAPTER XI.

MR. M'TAILING RESOLVES TO GET MARRIED.

THE short interview with his landlady had so unsettled poor Martin's nerves that he could not sleep a wink for several hours after he got into bed. There he lay, as wide awake as a broker selling shares. Again and again he bewailed his excessive bashfulness in female society—a weakness which had woefully barred his way in earlier life to matrimonial happiness ; and yet he could no more help the infirmity than he could help having bow legs. It was a constitutional weakness, which he thought he inherited from his grandfather, who was too shy to make love to any girl, and who wedded his mother's waiting-maid because she made love to him. Martin was not quite so weak as his ancestor, for he always carefully shunned girls who made unmaidenly advances to him ; and he certainly had plucked up courage to court Charlotte Grinley ; but then he did it by letter in the first place ; besides, she did not want pressing at all, for she sent a favouring answer by return of post. Alas ! that she should have proved so faithless !

A thousand times, or more, within the last fifteen

years Martin had wished himself married, and the desire took strong possession of him again that night. In those silent hours of darkness he boldly looked at the tender matter in all its bearings ; and, first of all, he argued with himself that it was a duty he owed to the world he lived in to get married ; for if everybody were to remain single it would be a poor look-out for builders and other tradesmen half a century or so hence, and where would landlords find tenants ? In short, the world would cease to move, figuratively speaking. He next took a more selfish view of the solemn obligation, and on the score of present personal comfort, and of prospective advantages, when he should grow old and infirm, it was a wise policy to marry. A wife was the natural helper of a helpless man, and the man who neglected to secure such a helper before he reached the meridian of life, ran a serious risk of going down single-handed to the horizon of death. He then drew a fanciful analogy between matrimony and life assurance, which showed that the longer a man deferred taking out a life policy the higher premium he would have to pay for it ; and, if any serious bodily mishap were to befall him while he was deliberating, he might not be able to insure at all. So in matrimony, the older a man grew the poorer chance he would have of winning a worthy helpmate ; and if any disabling casualty happened to him while he was on the look-out, no sensible woman would have him at all—it was not likely. He felt that he was blushing at the cool, calculating way in which he was thinking over the tenderest of social compacts ; but then, at his age a man ought to look with philosophical calmness on all great

matters. Besides, a man of forty-eight could not be expected to show the soft emotions of his boyhood over again.

Martin at length decided that, as he had now ample means to support a wife in affluence, he should be quite justified in getting married, and further, that it would be good policy to wed with all convenient speed, for he might any day be disabled, through the racing proclivities of the Sydney 'busmen, or the recklessness of fruit-eating citizens who throw their orange or banana skins on the foot pavements, as if they maliciously purposed to maim their fellow-pedestrians.

The next important consideration was, would Mrs. Carney be a suitable partner for him? She was the only woman he had in his eye. It was not the first time the question had occurred to him, though he had never thought it out carefully before. She was undoubtedly a kind woman, and had studied his comfort ever since he first lodged in her house with almost sisterly tenderness —nothing could exceed it short of conjugal relationship. Then she was comely in person, perhaps a trifle too stout, but that was a small matter when weighed against her domestic qualities, which were shiningly manifested all over her house. She was of suitable age for him—not more than 33 by her own showing. She had property too, but that he would not put in the estimate, he did not desire it, for he had more than enough for them both. It was true she had not a highly cultured intellect; her education had been neglected in her youth; still, he had never observed anything offensively vulgar either in her conversation or her taste. Her boys were tiresome

young urchins, but they certainly had shown signs of amendment of late, and he was sanguine that when he was in a position to exercise rightful authority over them, that a much greater improvement would be seen in their manners. Besides, they were growing up into great strapping lads, and in a year or so they would perhaps go to sea, or elsewhere away from home. At any rate, he would then be master of the house, and he should at all times compel the lads to behave themselves when under his roof, and it might be the making of them for after life if they had some strict guardian over them for a year or two, to break them off their monkey tricks.

Other considerations, besides those I have mentioned, also helped to strengthen Martin's opinion, that he would find Mrs. Carney a very desirable wife; but with the prudent caution which he had lately exercised in the share market, he determined not to be too hasty in humouring his wishes. Matrimony he knew was a very binding compact, and he would not enter upon it without solemn deliberation. His late uncle's acting executor, Mr. Fagwell, was a family man, and Martin resolved to seek his advice before finally deciding to change his state. Mr. Fagwell was a genial man, and had shown a most friendly feeling for Martin; indeed, he knew no person in the land whom he would so soon consult on any matter of a confidential nature. He had a natural right to expect honest counsel and sympathy from his sister and her husband; but he dared not breathe the subject of marriage to them again. He had, a few weeks before, made some jocose remark about the discomforts of a bachelor's life, and he observed that they looked uneasy;

and since then, they had said several disparaging things to him about his landlady, which he knew to be unjust. He would not say a word to them about his matrimonial longings, for it was pretty clear that they wished him to live and die single, for selfish reasons which he could not misunderstand. These reflections and calculations occupied his wakeful hours throughout the night, and he did not begin to feel sleepy until he heard the morning milk carts rattling in from Botany Bay.

The following afternoon Martin paid a special visit to Mr. Fagwell's office, and met with the usual cordial reception from that gentleman, who was always glad to have a friendly chat when he was not busy. It fortunately happened that he was at leisure on that occasion, so Martin sat down, and soon managed to drift on to the subject which he was most desirous of conversing about.

"So you have serious thoughts of getting married at last, have you, Martin?" said Mr. Fagwell, rubbing his hands and smiling. "Well, I am glad to hear it, my friend. Never too late to do well. I am sure you will be happier in the wedded state, if you get a suitable partner; but there is not much danger of a man of your age and experience making a mistake in that way. I presume you are engaged to a lady worthy of your choice? I don't mean to be inquisitive, you understand."

"I am not engaged at all, Fagwell. The only engagement I ever made was broken off years ago. You know that my circumstances, until very recently, have precluded my entertaining any idea of marrying, and have also shut me out, as it were, from society altogether. I have had no chance of making a choice, for worthy young ladies

do not often encourage poor beggars to make love to them. Fortune has again smiled upon me, as you know, and I have the certain prospect of an income, ten times more than I can reasonably spend on myself, so I think it is prudent of me to look out for a partner, who will help to cheer me along the remainder of life's journey."

"Quite right, my dear boy! A very wise determination," said Mr. Fagwell. "My own experience of wedded life has been a very cheery one, and my home has always been the centre of attraction to me. If you should be as successful as I have been in finding a wife who is congenial to your tastes, feelings, and habits—in brief, if you find as gentle and wise a woman as my dear little wife is, you will be a happy man, Martin, and I shall congratulate you with all my heart."

"I have heard that you have an excellent wife and a happy home, Fagwell."

"Yes, you rogue! You have heard it, but you have never been to see the happy sight, though I have invited you a dozen times. Why don't you come out and see my 'cottage near a wood,' and all my precious singing birds within it? You will be heartily welcome."

"I quite intend to give myself that pleasure, one of these days."

"That is too indefinite. Come with me this evening. I will drive you out."

"I cannot conveniently go this evening," said Martin, after a minute's reflection, "but I will go with you tomorrow evening."

"Very well, that is settled ; and you must stop a week when you are there. Mind that, my boy."

After a little further chat with his kind friend on the pleasures and responsibilities of married life, Martin took his leave and walked slowly homeward, with his mind almost made up to the critical decision of taking the first step that very night towards making a change in his solitary life.

Mrs. Carney usually opened the door for him, for the maid had sometimes made him rap twice, but on that afternoon Judith let him in, and he concluded that her mistress was out. On entering his bedroom, he was pleasingly startled at seeing a very soft-looking wool-work cushion on his easy-chair. He sat down on it to test its elasticity, and before his eyes on another chair, was a large parcel addressed to him. He opened it and a slip of paper dropped out, on which was written, "A small mark of gratitude, from Mrs. Carney and her two sons, to their generous friend and benefactor." The parcel contained a handsome coloured dressing-gown, a pair of worked slippers to match it, and a beautifully embroidered smoking cap, with a silk tassel about a foot long. Mrs. Carney had bought them all at David Jones's that afternoon.

"Well, well ! How kind and considerate, to be sure !" he exclaimed, as he gazed at the present. He then tried them all on, and sat down on the cushion, looking as smart as a Grand Turk. Mrs. Carney and her boys had gone to tea at Uncle Drench's house, so Martin was spared the embarrassing task of thanking them just then, and he fancied he might be able to do it more

collectedly in the cool of the morning. Judith gave his tea by himself in the drawing-room.

After tea he again donned his dressing-gown, slippers, and cap ; and with his feet on the fender, and his new cushion making his easy-chair easier, he leant back his head and indulged in mental kaleidoscopic views of domestic felicity in the future ; his eyes, the while, seemed to be studying the widow's picture on the wall. Now and then, as he furtively glanced at the late Mr. Carney's picture, he thought the old gentleman scowled at him, but that was a mere nervous fancy, the scowl was a natural expression. The result of an hour's reflection in that voluptuous attitude, was a resolution to propose to Mrs. Carney without delay. Although he felt that he had not any ardent love for her, he reasoned, that if as a lodger merely, his esteem for her was so strong, surely as her husband esteem would soon ripen into something much stronger.

He wrote a letter on the spur of that decision, and when he read it slowly over, to correct punctuation, he felt proud of his talent at composition. It was indeed a sensible effusion compared with many productions of the kind. There was not a gushing sentence in it, and it was as free from silly, stock love phrases as it was from blots or grammatical blunders. As a man of principle, he disdained to write a word that was not true, so he never used the term *love*. He spoke of a growing *feeling* which had sprung from respect for her domestic talents and her managing virtues ; and, to remove all suspicion of mercenary motives, he said he would make a settlement on her of her own property, and also of all his

interest in the Wattle Dabster and the Siamese Twins gold companies, of the estimated value of £2,300. He solemnly promised to be a father to her sons ; and finally he said, that if she condescended to favour his suit, his whole future life should be devoted to the comfort of his home and all the blessed objects belonging to it. The winding up of his letter was very touching.





CHAPTER XII.

MARTIN SPENDS A WEEK IN HIS FRIEND FAGWELL'S HOME.

THE next morning Martin read his letter over again, and quite approved of it; so he gummed it up, put it into his breast pocket, and then went into the breakfast parlour, with his heart full of new hopes and longings. He had during the night composed and learnt off a neat little speech, expressive of his gratified feelings on receipt of his new dressing gown, cap, and slippers. Soon after grace had been said, Martin began his speech; but before he had uttered twenty words, one of the boys burst into a noisy laugh, while the other boy was nearly choking himself with hot porridge, to keep his mirth from bubbling over.

“Davy! I am amazed at your rude conduct!” exclaimed Mrs. Carney, looking whipsticks at her youngest son.

“Well, ‘ma, I couldn’t help it. Saul tickled my knee under the table.”

“Saul! I am ashamed of you!” she added, with a menacing scowl which would have made a timid lad

tremble, but it only made Saul's pent-up waggery break out into an uproarious guffaw, and his brother to giggle again, until his face was as red as a cooked cray-fish.

"This behaviour is past all bearing!" vociferated the widow, springing up and seizing the hearth broom. "I'll massacre you both if I catch you!" But they were too nimble for any stout lady to massacre, after giving them notice of her design; out of the house they scampered, jumping over or upsetting everything in their way. She pursued them down to the back gate and then gave up the chase. She might as well have tried to run down a pair of wild rabbits, or two scared cats.

"I really don't know what excuse to make to you, Mr. M'Tailing;" whined the widow, when she came in again flushed and flurried.

"Pray don't say another word about it, ma'am!" said Martin, trying to laugh. "Boys will be boys at all times. My little speech tickled their fancy, I suppose. I didn't think they meant to be rude; but I will reason with them on the subject when I meet them again."

"I never knew them to behave so strangely before in all their lives. I really don't know what has possessed the boys of late, unless it is my allowing them to go to the circus too often. Clowns don't do boys a bit of good. I am very sorry indeed, sir, but I'll punish them for their wicked tricks. They shall go to school without their breakfast."

Martin had, a minute before, seen Judith hand the boys two thick rounds of bread and butter over the back palings, but he did not mention the occurrence to their excited mother. He felt for her vexation, and at the

same time he mentally determined that he would adopt stringent measures to stop the clownish antics of her sons, if he should become their step-father. After breakfast he went to his bedroom and packed a few little necessary articles into a valise, and then he returned to the parlour, with his heart in a commotion which he was, with all his might, striving to calm down. "I am going away for a few days, perhaps for a week, Mrs. Carney," he said pathetically.

"O dear me, sir ! I hope and trust it is not on account of the unruly behaviour of my boys, just now. I'll skin 'em when they come home !"

"No, no ; by no means, my dear madam. I have accepted an invitation from a kind old friend, to spend a few days at his house out of town. The change will do me good perhaps ; I have had too much excitement in the city of late. Hum—ah—hem—Mrs. Carney, will you kindly favour me by perusing this letter at your leisure ? And—hem—a—a—my dear madam ! perhaps I may hope to receive an answer to it from you when I return. Good-bye, ma'am !" He was outside the front door before Mrs. Carney could speak a word in reply. But there was a peculiar expression in her wide eyes, which he observed just for a moment, when he handed her the letter, which filled his heart with joyous hopes that his address would be read with yearning interest, and be favourably responded to.

Mr. Fagwell's "cottage near a wood," as he poetically called it, was a few miles out of town, not a great way from Botany Bay. It was a moderately large house, although it had all the coziness of a cottage in its internal

comfortable arrangements, and its surroundings were as picturesque as any poet's fancy could desire. Good taste was everywhere manifested.

When Martin first entered the house with his jocund host, he felt his heart warm up with welcome, and his diffidence mellowed into easy assurance as soon as he saw Mrs. Fagwell ; for there was something irresistibly smoothing in her kind calm reception, and he scarcely needed the hearty invitation of his host, to make himself at home. He felt himself at home ; and was pleased that his good friend had such a happy home to invite him to. The children were not long in coming to welcome home their loving sire. They did not "climb his knees the envied kiss to share ;" for they were, with one exception, all too tall for that mode of affectionate demonstration ; but they showed their love in a way quite as unmistakeable. They were certainly a fine group of girls and boys ; healthy, intelligent, and tractable. Martin thought he had never before seen seven children of a household show so much unaffected attachment for each other. An involuntary sigh escaped him as he contrasted the gentleman-like demeanour of the boys, when at the table, with the slangy vulgarity of the brothers Carney ; and he resolved to keep two of the young Fagwells in his mind's eye, as models in his future training of his tricky stepsons, elect. He had great confidence in his power to train the Carney boys.

After tea some of the children went to their lessons, others to their recreation, but all of them were relieved from parental restraint, nor did they seem to need it. They had the full freedom of their home, and it was clear

that their parents had confidence in them. He did not hear a reprobating sentence uttered by either parent, nor did he see a scowling look on any face in the house. He mentally noted the pleasing facts, and determined to give Mrs. Carney a few hints, when he was master, on the comfortable policy of speaking softly to her sons, instead of nagging them, as she was accustomed to do every day of her life. He thought it would be quite as easy, and twice as pleasant, to say, "Davy, it is time to go to school, dear!" as to say, "Davy, go to school directly, you young monkey!" Or to say, "Saul, my son! I wish you to go to church with me this evening," rather than to say harshly, "Saul, come away to church with me, sir!" He would make a thorough reform in Leatherkin Cottage life, by and bye, and he was glad he had come to his friend Fagwell's house to learn the way to do it. It was a pity that two fine boys should be spoilt by injudicious training.

There was a young lady staying at Mr. Fagwell's, who, at first sight, strikingly reminded Martin of Charlotte Grinley, and a rush of old feeling made his heart tingle for a while, but he soon got over it. On calmer observation of the lady, he found that the resemblance between her and his faithless lover was mainly in her height and figure; she was much superior to Charlotte in ladylike manners; besides, she could sing and play the piano very nicely, and had a few other accomplishments which Charlotte was lacking in. Miss Smith was wholly unconscious that Martin was observing her with so much interest; indeed, he scarcely understood his own swelling emotion until he had been in the house five

days, and then his heart gently suggested that if he had not written to Mrs. Carney, he might try to find out in some quiet way if Miss Smith were engaged or not.

A week passed away very agreeably. Martin had not so thoroughly enjoyed a season of rest and recreation for many years. Mr. Fagwell had an excellent library, in which Martin spent many profitable hours, and the rest of his time during the days was pleasantly passed in rambling about the grounds and the model farm, and his evenings were divided between the social family circle and cosy *tête-à-tête* chats with his merry host, who always came home with his mind shaken free from his official cares. Martin was sorry when his visit was about to end.

"Must you really go away to-morrow, my friend?" asked Mr. Fagwell, as he and Martin sat enjoying a cigar in a balcony commanding a fine view of an expansive bay, which the moon was silverying over with her full beams. "Why cannot you stop another week with us?"

"Thank you, Fagwell. I should much like to stop, for I have wonderfully enjoyed this visit, but I must go back to Sydney to-morrow, I have some matters to look after in town; besides, I told my good landlady that I should return in a week, and she will expect me."

"Where are you lodging, Martin?"

"At Redfern, with a Mrs. Carney."

"Oh indeed; old Joe Carney's widow, at Leatherkin Cottage."

"Do you know Mrs. Carney, Fagwell?"

"Yes, to be sure. I knew her as a girl. Her father made my boots for years, and her husband used to do all my harness work. He was a first-rate saddler, and an honest man. I dare say he left her pretty well off."

Martin coughed away a little nervous feeling, and then said, "I may tell you, confidentially, Fagwell, that I have an idea of marrying Mrs. Carney, for I think she will make me a very comfortable wife."

"That's the secret of your wanting to go home to-morrow, is it? Ha, ha, ha! You are a wicked wag, Martin, though you look so innocent. Well, she is a lively, buxom widow, and she is able enough to take care of you, no doubt. She has a family, has she not?"

"Only two boys; remarkably fine boys they are, regular young giants for their age."

"Yes, their father was a big-boned man. I hope you will be happy, Martin. When are you going to be married?"

"I cannot tell you that; in fact, I am not quite sure that she will have me. I proposed to her, by letter, just before I left home. I expect an answer when I get back."

"It's all right, my boy! She will have you, safe enough, so make your mind easy, and stop here another week."

"You are very kind; but I think I would rather go home to-morrow, Fagwell. There may be some business letters waiting for me."

"Ah! well, it is natural for you to be impatient at such a time, so I will drive you home to-morrow morning. By the way, how are you getting on with your mining

speculations? I have heard you named among our growing millionaires."

Martin smilingly replied, "I have invested about half of my capital in some of the most promising things afloat, in gold, copper, and tin."

"Don't you think it would be prudent to invest the other half in something less risky than mining shares, Martin? A good safe mortgage, for instance, or city debentures. A wise merchant never risks all his stock on one bottom, you know."

"I am dividing my risks very carefully, Fagwell. I have seen what rash mining speculation has done for some of my friends in Victoria, and I am exceedingly cautious. I think every spec I have gone into is safe and sound."

"That is the notion which every honest speculator gets into his head, Martin, and I feel morally certain that many of them will be mistaken. Out of the hundreds of companies that are now afloat, how many have actually found gold in their claims, think you?"

"Perhaps not a third of them; and I believe there are many bubbles afloat that will burst before long with disastrous effects."

"I have been told by an intelligent man, from one of the busiest mining districts, that not more than a dozen claims have found payable gold; and he further told me that some of the claims which have been taken up and floated into companies with large capital, have no more show of gold in them than there is in the Sydney Hay-market. So be careful in your speculations, Martin, my boy."

Notwithstanding Martin spent another half-hour before bed time in trying to show that no man could possibly be more careful than he was, he judged, from the occasional pithy remarks of Mr. Fagwell, that he was not thoroughly convinced of the fact.





CHAPTER XIII.

MARTIN BUYS TWO SHARES IN THE ETNA GOLD
COMPANY FOR HIS SISTER.

MRS. Carney was out shopping when Martin returned home. Judith said her mistress did not expect him home till the evening. There were a dozen letters lying on his dressing-table, and he sat down to read them. The top one of the pile was from Mrs. Carney ; a reply to his proposals, and nothing could be more favourable to an anxious suitor. She accepted his offer unconditionally. It was a short epistle, though it had perhaps taken her a long time to indite, for she was not a ready writer. In a postscript, she apologized for the brevity of her letter, but promised to explain all particulars by word of mouth. She hoped he would not stay away longer than a week.

Why did Martin sit wrapt in sombre reflection for an hour after reading that ready response to his amatory advances ? Was he shocked at the orthographical defects of the missive ; or did the absence of any gushing love sentence grieve him ? Was it too cold for his warm nature, or was it too complying ? Sometimes a heart

that is too readily surrendered, is not so highly esteemed as it would be if it only yielded to the besiegement of importunate courting. Neither of these surmises is the right one. The cause of his thoughtfulness was a secret which he would not have whispered even in an empty house ; for he was as delicate as he was honest. He had lately seen some one whom he thought would have made a far more companionable wife for him than Mrs. Carney ; a young lady of refined manners and tastes, and without the incumbrance of two racketty boys. It is true, he did not know that she was not engaged ; but he would like to have been in a position to ask the question. He felt that he had been precipitate in his advances to his landlady. That was the cause of his pensiveness, at a season when most men are jubilant. Nevertheless, he had committed himself, and he would not seek to back out of his contract. Perhaps it will be all for the best, he thought. Mrs. Carney was a woman of experience. He had proved that she was of a kindly nature and of homely habits ; and after all, domestic qualities were more conducive to genuine home comfort than fashionable accomplishments and ladylike looks. With regard to the boys, he had marked out a certain course of moral training for them, and he should firmly adhere to it. He would allow no Tom and Jerry tricks in his house.

"Ah me !" sighed Martin. "I dare say it will be all right. Mrs. Carney is a nice woman, and I have no doubt my love for her will spring up by and bye. She has accepted my offer, so it will be dishonourable of me to think any more of Miss Smith."

Martin then put Mrs. Carney's letter into his desk,

and began to examine all the other letters on his table. Several of them were prospectuses of new gold companies ; he threw them aside for Judith to light her kitchen fire with. Temptingly worded as they were, he would have nothing to do with them.

Another letter, with the Gulgong post-mark, was from a Mr. Sharp, a tailor by trade, but a man of an enterprising spirit, which could not stoop to dull, plodding means of acquiring wealth. Martin had lent him £30 a few weeks before, to start him on a prospecting tour through the gold districts. He had no scientific skill to guide him, but he was confident that he knew as much of mineralogy as many others knew, who had made immense strokes at Hill End and elsewhere. In addition to the ten per cent. interest, which he guaranteed to pay Martin for the loan, he had promised, in a grateful spirit, that he would apprise him, without delay, if he met with anything which promised to be worth Martin's while to go into, with all his city influence. His letter described, in the usual hyperbolical style of prospectors, a paddock of fifteen acres (securely encompassed by a cockatoo fence), which was highly auriferous, every inch of it. It was the property of a humble farmer near Mudgee, who had actually turned up nuggets while ploughing the paddock for his potato crop. He still kept the paddock under crop, merely as a blind, to keep off Chinese fossickers. He offered to sell one-half of his share in it for £550, with the proviso that it should, within five weeks, without cost to him, be floated into a company, on the model or scheme of the famous Williams claim ; in which case, he was willing to gua-

rantee a dividend of half-a-crown a share, in three months from the launching off of the company.

Martin shook his head several times as he read the letter, and despite the powerful recommendation of Sharp to go into the thing at once, and get Blocks to prepare a stunning prospectus, he flung the letter into Judith's heap. He was more than ever resolved to be exceedingly careful in his investments, as he had now the prospect of having a wife and family to look after. The next letter he opened was from his sister, inviting him to tea that evening. There was a letter also from Mr. Blocks, with encouraging news from the Wattle Dabster's manager, who had reported the main shaft down thirty-six feet, and a sudden find of blue clay mixed with black mud. A sure indication of something beneath it. Shares had gone up five shillings. The last letter he opened was from Mr. Sparrow, requesting to see him without delay, on important business, *re Siamese Twins*.

Martin left a message with the maid for her mistress, to the effect that he was going to tea with his sister, and would not be home till late that evening. He added, "I have my latch-key with me, Judith." He went direct to Mr. Sparrow's office, and found him in a petulant humour on account of Martin's absence from the Board meeting of the Siamese Twins. He waited until Mr. Sparrow had vented off a little natural bluster, and then he explained that he had been on a visit to a friend in the country; moreover, he said, he did not know that his presence was necessary at every Board meeting.

"Pooh! That's all humbug, Mac. Wasn't it mutually agreed that we would all use strenuous, back-bone efforts

to float the Twins? While Tubal and I have been pushing till we are black in the face, what have you been doing, I should like to know? How many shares have you sold?"

"I have not sold any at all, Mr. Sparrow."

"Not sold any! That's cool talk for a promoter. I sent you 250 prospectuses; what have you done with them?"

"They are perfectly safe. I have them all at my lodgings."

"Safe indeed! Why the dickens have you not sent them out, right and left. You are a nice lively promoter, certainly! I am sorry we took you in."

"Don't be cross, Sparrow. I told you not to send me a heap of prospectuses. You have printed ten times more than enough, and it is a waste of money, I don't know who to send the things to."

"Send them everywhere—to anybody you know—that's the plan; and push about among your friends and acquaintances. The old woman that you lodge with has plenty of money, hasn't she?"

"The lady that I lodge with does not happen to be an old woman, Mr. Sparrow," said Martin, with dignified emphasis.

"O go to Bath! We have two drones in the concern, and I'll bet a guinea it won't float, after all my manoeuvring. That shy, flowery-lipped fellow, Brush, promised to shove off two thousand shares in the Adelaide market, and he has not done a stroke more than you have."

"Well, I suppose he cannot compel folks to buy shares any more than I can, Mr. Sparrow."

"Compel! No; but you can persuade folks to buy, if you like to go at it pluckily. You had better sell out of the concern, and let some one come in in your place who is not too stiff for honest work. What will you take for your share?"

"I will take £500," said Martin, eagerly.

"Don't you wish you may get it?"

"You told me that you asked a man £500 for only half a share, Sparrow."

"I did so; and I would not sell half of my share to-day for twice that sum. Joking aside, you had better stick to your share, Mac, and go in with us with all your might to float the thing right off, and it will be a fortune for the lot of us." Mr. Sparrow said this in a softer tone, and added, "We have had a most encouraging letter from Mr. Jerry Buttons. He wishes us to float the company as soon as possible, for he wants to see machinery on the claim, to crush out the galores of rich stone 'at grass.'"

"No doubt it is tantalizing to a man to have an abundance of gold beneath his feet, and not have the appliances for making it pocketable; but I do not see any reason for being in a hurry with our operations. If the gold is in the ground it will not run away or evaporate; that is certain. I shall stick to my promoter's share, Sparrow, and I am willing to do my share of legitimate work in floating a company; but I will not press my friends to invest their money in it, for that would look like selfishness. It is my opinion—and I have heard others express the same belief—that there will be millions of English money in our mining market before long, for

our wonderful mineral discoveries of late are sure to affect the spirits of speculating capitalists at home. Then our Siamese Twins will——”

Mr. Sparrow here interrupted Martin's prognostic by testily bidding him go to Jericho. A rupture would probably have ensued (for Martin never liked to be bullied), but just then there was a rap-tap-tap at the office door. Mr. Sparrow knew, by the boldness of the knocks, that it was somebody of official consequence, so he smoothed his features and tipped Martin the wink to be off. He was not sorry to go, for Sparrow was in a grumbling mood that morning.

Martin's sister received him affectionately when he went there at tea-time, and his brother-in-law also gave him a hearty welcome. After tea Mr. Blough took Martin into his confidence, and told him full particulars of his recent gold speculations, which were looking promising in the extreme. He wound up by requesting the loan of £200 from Martin, to purchase a half-share in an auriferous creek at Adelong. Martin did not like to refuse him in the presence of his family, so he forthwith gave him a cheque for £200, and received, as security, scrip in the Eldorado Gold Company, valued at £300, also Mr. Blough's IOU, with a stamp on it.

“Now, as a little acknowledgment for this favour, Martin,” said Mr. Blough, as he pocketed the cheque, “I will let you in for a couple of shares in the Etna Gold Company at Green Valley. It is a rare spec, I assure you; in fact, there is nothing like it in the valley, and the shares are in the hands of a select few. We have lately bought all the new machinery off an adjoining

claim, a dead bargain, nearly £1,700 worth of material for £200 ; and we shall soon be ready to crush away like fury."

" But have you any stone worth crushing ? " Martin asked.

" My word we have ! Our claim is ten acres, and there is a reef to every acre. We have a shaft down nearly 100 feet, and when we get the engine to work and pump the water out, we shall, without doubt, come upon a rich vein. Our mining manager is a first-rate man, and a promoter also. I have gone into the thing heavily, because I believe in it. I advise you to take the two shares, Martin, while you have the chance. Only £20. for the two. Cheap as chips ! "

" I have made a promise to myself that I will not go into any more gold companies, Blough. I will keep my word ; but as you have such faith in this company I will treat my sister to two shares, and I hope they will be a fortune for her. I will give you a cheque to-morrow."

" O thank you, thank you, Martin, dear ! " exclaimed his sister, kissing him gratefully ; " you were always a kind-hearted, generous brother. Jemima and Billy, kiss your dear, kind uncle ! "

Mr. Blough briefly expressed his thankfulness for the unexpected gift, and suggested to his wife that she should, out of the very first dividend she received, make her good brother a present of a gold chronometer watch, with an appropriate inscription engraved on the case. His wife said she certainly would do it with pleasure, and buy him a handsome gold chain as well.



CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. CARNEY "NAMES THE DAY."

 T was past eleven o'clock when Martin returned to Leatherkin Cottage. He opened the door as noiselessly as possible, lest he should disturb any of the sleeping inmates ; but before he had fastened it again, he was met in the hall by his watchful landlady. He was beginning to apologize for keeping late hours, when she smilingly assured him that he had not put her to the slightest inconvenience ; and she added, "The truth is, I made up my mind to wait up for you. It seems such a long time since I saw you. Come into the parlour. I have got some stewed oysters for your supper."

Martin was emboldened by her frank, homely manner ; so he hung his hat up and followed her into the parlour, where the easiest chair was drawn up for him on the cosy side of the chimney ; his dressing-gown lay upon the chair, and his slippers were warming inside the fender. Everything betokened such kind thoughtfulness on the part of his hostess, that he felt glad and grateful, though he did not want the oysters.

"I am much obliged to you for your welcome letter,

Mrs. Carney," Martin said, after he had comfortably seated himself. "I read it as soon as I came home this morning; and I have thought about it a dozen times to-day."

"I am sorry it was so short and imperfect. But never mind; I can tell you all I want to say better than I can write it. Judith has gone to bed long ago, so there is nobody to disturb us. I waited up on purpose."

"It is very good of you, ma'am."

"Oh don't call me mum and Mrs. Carney any more. It sounds so stiff-like." She said this in a tone of playful remonstrance, which made her look quite girlish for a minute. "Call me Maria, when we are alone."

"I shall be most proud to do so," said Martin, who was getting brisker every moment. "And mind, you must not call me Mr. M'Tailing any more, for I look upon it that we are solemnly engaged to each other."

"Oh, certainly! Quite so; and I shall call you Martin, when there is nobody within hearing; dear Martin, by-and-bye, you know. Ha, ha! Won't it seem funny?"

Martin felt that his love was beginning to grow, and his confidence increased so fast, that he presently told Maria that "it was customary to seal all such soft compacts with a ratifying kiss." She blushed a little, and smiled again in a girlish way, but before she had time to argue against the motion, Martin got up, gave her a modest kiss, and then sat down again, quite satisfied, and mentally congratulating himself that the dreaded preliminaries had been got over so smoothly. He had fidgetted himself for a whole week about "breaking the ice," as he

termed it ; and now that it was fairly broken, he felt as serenely composed as a patient after getting a troublesome tooth out.

Maria then began to tell him all she wished to tell him, and it took her about twenty minutes fast talking. It was a simple confession of the gradual growth of her respect, esteem, and love for him ever since he had been under her roof. She felt sure that he was a gentleman, and that he would do his best to make her happy, and also to help to make her darling boys ornaments to society. For her part, she was prepared to love, honour, and obey him, and to devote her future life to his comfort and happiness.

Martin sat and calmly listened to her tale of love and duty, and when she paused, he said he tenderly reciprocated all her sentiments and feelings ; that she had won his respect, esteem, and affection, and his life and fortune should be devoted to the welfare of herself and her promising sons. He then added, in a more business-like tone, "I promised to make over to you, Maria, by way of a marriage settlement, gold shares of the value of £2,300 ; but in order to make doubly sure—for gold affairs are fluctuating—I intend to secure to you, in addition, £2,000 worth of my Northern Bullseye copper shares ; so that, if anything should befall me, you and your dear boys will be handsomely provided for."

" Dear, generous Martin ! " exclaimed Maria, in an overflowing gush of grateful feeling ; at the same instant she sprang up and gave him another kiss, warm and pleasing, though rather too loud if anybody had been awake up-stairs. " My blessed boys will love you fondly,

Martin, I am sure. It shall be my study to teach them to do it by my daily example."

"Have you told them of our engagement, Maria?"

"No, no, dear; not a word; and I would not breathe a syllable of it to a living soul until we are married. Let us arrange everything quietly."

"I shall be very glad to do so, my love. I don't want any of my relations to know of our union until it is consummated. They would only annoy me with their selfish objections. The more secretly we can arrange everything the better I shall be pleased. I dislike wedding cake and wedding jokes, and all nonsense of the kind."

Maria suggested that they might have a quiet cake, after they came home, just for fashion's sake, and to please the boys; but they would not have a houseful of grinning folks to breakfast with them. She then entered into a further exposition of her plans and projects; she had evidently thought them well over, and they seemed so prudently devised, that Martin agreed to them *in toto*. She proposed to make all necessary preparations without stir or show. No one was to be a bit the wiser, save her dressmaker, who had too sharp an eye to her own interests to let out trade secrets. On the happy day, they were to meet at Parramatta and be married by a minister, a friend of hers, that she could safely trust with a secret, and whom she would see in the interim. After the ceremony they could go for a week or so to Richmond, or Kurrajong. Judith must be taken into their confidence, but she need not know anything until the eve of the wedding day, and the boys must wait until a

day or two afterwards. Judith would then break the joyful news to them.

Martin expressed his approval of her plans, in complimentary terms, and then he ventured to ask her to name the important day. After a little natural hesitancy, she blushingly simpered, "This day fortnight."

Martin felt happy. It was past one o'clock when he went to bed.

Soon after he got up the next morning, he was surprised by a visit from Mr. Drench. He begged pardon for coming at such an unseasonable hour, but he had such a press of assaying work in hand, that he was forced to dispense with ceremony—in fact, he had scarcely time for his meals, and no time at all for his prayers. The purport of his errand, stated in few words, was as follows :—His good friend, Mr. Vaux, had made a flying trip to the hills where the big nuggets grow, to see if he could pick up something that would make his fortune directly. Other men, less gifted than himself, had done the trick, and why should not he? Anyway he would try his luck. He got six days' leave of absence and started for Hill End, with the plucky determination of doing something before he came back. As he was coming out of church, on the evening after his arrival, a strange man pulled his coat tail and whispered in his ear, "I can sell you a stunning gold claim." Mr. Vaux had conscientious objections to all Sunday trafficking, and for a moment he felt shocked at the proposition of the stranger; but after a short chat with him outside the church fence he showed such forcible reasons why he could not conveniently wait till Monday that Mr. Vaux stifled his scruples for once,

and went off straightway to inspect the said claim by the light of the stars. On the way thither he talked to the man on good subjects, and he seemed to be seriously impressed. Mr. Vaux was greatly pleased with the size of the claim, which appeared ever so much bigger than Attwood's. The man was so positive of its being in a direct line with all the great nuggety claims, that after stepping over the allotment and finding it to be an acre, good measure, Mr. Vaux struck a bargain for it on the spot. He had not half enough cash with him to pay for it, but he paid a deposit, and the vendor, Patrick Murphy, agreed to wait for the balance until the claim was floated into a company, in Sydney. Mr. Vaux hastened home by the first coach, and he was then diligently engaged in floating his prize, as the Great British Statesman Gold Quartz Company.

Mr. Drench gave the above particulars very rapidly, and he added, as he rose up to go, "Will you take any shares, Mr. M'Tailing? Knowing this to be an undeniably genuine concern I thought I would drop in on my way to the office, to tell you of it. I may say, I am in the thing myself."

"Stay a minute or two, Mr. Drench; I make a point of considering carefully before I invest my money in shares, especially in new gold companies."

"Then let me tell you, sir, you are likely to miss many rare chances of making money. These are not the times for dilly-dallying. I grant you it is right and reasonable for a man to use caution ; but things that are guaranteed to be first-rate are snapped up in a trice ; and the 'man who deliberates is lost,' as the poet says. I'll warrant

these shares will all go off before to-morrow night. The very name of Mr. Vaux will sell them, for everybody in the city knows his sterling moral character, and he can vouch that he has personally inspected the claim."

"I would not question the commercial honesty of the gentleman, Mr. Drench; still, I do not think that his bargaining for a gold mine inside a church on the Lord's Day, is characteristic of his active piety."

"Pardon me, sir; I think I told you that he spoke to the man Murphy, outside of the church palings."

"Yes, so you did; I made a little mistake there. But, at any rate, I have no sympathy at all with Sunday dealing; and if the British Statesman Company turns out a failure, I shall be disposed to attribute it to the circumstance of its having been bargained for on a Sabbath-day."

"I cannot stop to argue that point with you, sir. You may be right in the main, though your view savours of superstition," said Mr. Drench, somewhat testily. "Personally I am a strong stickler for Sabbath observance; but under the peculiar circumstances of this case, I can hardly censure my worthy friend. I could not conscientiously cast the first stone at him. These are exciting times, you know, sir; and a good man may temporarily forget his principles. As to your remarks about the failure of this company, I do not expect any such casualty, sir; but I can tell you of half a dozen companies that certainly will fail, and they were not bargained for on a Sabbath-day. I hear the 'bus coming and I must go. Say in a word, will you take any shares?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Drench. I decline to go into the thing at present."

"Very well, sir. There is no harm done; but I am sorry I have given myself so much trouble to serve you. I wish you good morning." Mr. Drench then departed, looking less smirky than he did when he arrived. Martin was sorry he had ruffled the temper of Mrs. Carney's kinsman; still, he thought he had better do that than invest his money in such a risky venture.

Perhaps I may as well mention here, and have done with it, that the British Statesman collapsed before a pick was struck in the mine. It was not owing to any lack of floating energy or influence in its projector, but solely to the trickiness of Paddy Murphy. It appears that a mining manager was sent up to begin operations, but he could not find the claim, and Murphy declined to show it to him, perhaps because he had re-sold it to some other eager Sydney prospector,—or more likely, because the claim did not belong to him at all. Mr. Vaux was confident that he could find it himself, by starlight, so he went up again and searched for three whole nights, without success. In the meantime, Paddy Murphy decamped, nobody knew whither, so Mr. Vaux had no honest alternative but to hasten back to Sydney, to withdraw the British Statesman from the market, and return the money he had received from various contributors. He pocketed the loss himself.

He has since solemnly promised his wife that he will never again deal for a gold mine on a Sunday.



CHAPTER XV.

MR. M'TAILING GOES HEAVILY INTO PEAK DOWNS COPPER SHARES.



HAVE before intimated that Martin was of an anxious disposition. Notwithstanding the smoothness of his connubial prospects, the easy compliance of Mrs. Carney with his heart's desire, and the highly promising aspect of his pecuniary investments, he felt a good deal of his characteristic fidgetiness because he had spent a whole week in rural enjoyment at Mr. Fagwell's house, while more than a thousand pounds of his capital were lying in the bank unproductive. He had been, as it were, sleeping on the sunny bank of fortune's stream, while the flood tide was bubbling past him, and bearing many active spirits on to independence. He was conscious that he had betrayed a nervous irritability before Mr. Drench, but he hoped Mrs. Carney did not notice it at breakfast-time.

Soon after Mr. Drench had gone, Martin started into town, with a full determination to do business before the day ended, by way of making up for his late inactivity. First of all he called upon his tailor, and gave him an order for a full-dress suit. Of course he did not tell Mr.

Wilson that it was his wedding outfit, but that experienced *artiste* knew all about it, by Martin's languishing pose or attitude as he stood to be measured, and by his extreme fastidiousness in the choice of his waistcoat material. His secret was safe, however, for first-class tailors, and dressmakers, and jewellers never gossip.

He next went to Blocks's office, where he learnt the pleasing news that Rapp's shares were looking up. There were several large buyers in the market, and a well-known rich claimholder at Hill End had offered a price for all he could lay his hands on. British Lions were not so active ; but they were sure to rally after the next crushing, and be firmer than ever. Peak Downs stood at £8, cum div., and holders were looking for £10, or more. Pioneer shares were easier ; and Blocks advised him to operate in them while holders were inclined to relax their late extreme stiffness. Inverells were quiet. Martin facetiously remarked that they were noisy enough a fortnight ago. A long report had arrived from the mining manager of the Tabernacle Hill Company ; but it was written in low Dutch; and neither the directors nor the secretary could read a word of it. A new manager—a Yorkshireman—had been sent by express, to supersede the Dutchman, and high hopes were encouraged that he would turn up tin by the ton.

Martin instructed Blocks to feel through the market for a parcel of Peak Downs, but not to close for any till he saw him again in the afternoon. He then went to M'Cullum Brothers' office to inquire how the Northern Bullseyes were getting on. The junior M'Cullum was sorry to tell him that the shares were gently falling ; not

through any alteration in the prospects of the mine, but from an impatient desire of some of the promoters to realize at 50 per cent. premium. Several promoter's shares had been thrown on to the market as low as £75; but prices were sure to rally in a week or two. He had heard of a few sales of contributors' shares at a small premium, but only a few, for speculators in general gave a preference to paid-up scrip. For his part, he would not sell a share at any price, and he was sanguine that they would, by-and-bye, set him on his commercial legs again. The work at the mine was going on in a satisfactory manner, and the miners were all in good spirits. They were at work night and day at the tunnel, and there was no saying how soon they might strike a lode. The directors had cautiously decided not to erect smelting furnaces at present, but to send all their ore to Bowenfels or Waratah. The first call had been promptly responded to, with a few shabby exceptions, and the legal manager and the directors were working together as harmoniously as church choristers.

On the whole, Martin considered M'Cullum's plain statement of facts to be encouraging. No man in his senses would expect a copper mine to be developed in a few weeks. Patience was a special virtue in all such operations. The directors were men of judgment and integrity, and it was right to encourage them by showing his confidence in the concern. Let needy or greedy promoters sell out if they chose, but he would hold on to his shares as his plucky friend M'Cullum was doing. The farmer who, after sowing his land, would sit down and worry himself to death with anxiety lest his seed

should not spring up, must be a fool or a madman. He (Martin) had put in his seed—figuratively speaking—after carefully preparing his ground, and now he would patiently wait for the harvest-home—a rich ingathering of pure copper tiles. In the comfortable frame of mind which such philosophical reasoning was calculated to induce, Martin went to the Exchange to lunch.

There was a seafaring man sitting at the opposite side of the table to Martin, and he soon grew communicative. He stated that he had left his vessel lying in one of the Northern rivers, and come to Sydney expressly to dispose of an extravagantly rich claim which he had discovered when rambling a few miles into the bush by himself, while his ship was taking in cedar. He had drawn a chart of the road to the claim, and a plan of the claim itself, with all the reefs and veins marked on it, with sailor-like accuracy. He offered to sell his interest to Martin for £500, cash down on the nail, as he wanted to start back to his ship by that night's steamer. Although he backed the truth of his statements by some powerful oaths, Martin declined to speculate; but to rid himself of the man's importunity, he recommended him to go to Mr. Corke, the mining agent, who was said to be the most expert man in town at floating gold companies on short notice. It is plain that the man followed Martin's counsel, for a few days afterwards a flaming prospectus appeared in the newspapers of the "Jolly Jack Tar Gold-mining Company; capital, £15,000." If the thing did not float buoyantly, it was not through any omission of the agent to offer every tempting induce-

ment he could possibly invent ; and no prospectus in the world ever looked more enticing, or made stronger assertions of *bona-fide* character.

When Martin returned to Blocks's office he found him in high spirits. He had made two nice little hits on his own private account, and he had at the same time been attentive to Martin's interest. After an anxious search through most of the mining centres, he had found a man who was willing to sell 200 Peak Downs at £7 15s., and had induced him to keep his offer open for four hours. Blocks strongly advised Martin to close the bargain at once, as delays were dangerous in mining matters.

"I have not cash enough to pay for 200 shares, Blocks," said Martin, after calmly considering the proposition for a minute or two. "Half that number of shares will be sufficient for me. I like to distribute my ventures, you know."

"He won't split the parcel, Mac. I tried him, and it was no go ; in fact, he does not care whether he sells or not. If you don't take the lot you will miss a chance, I can tell you."

"Well, but I can't take the lot, Blocks. I tell you again, I have not money to pay for them. I cannot spare more than £1,000 at the present time."

"Perhaps that sum will do in cash ; I dare say he will take your bill for the balance ; indeed, I know he will if I recommend it."

"I don't like to give a bill, Blocks."

"Tush ! Nonsense, man ! Don't be such a goose ! There will be a dividend in less than a month, and

it will be 50 per cent. at least. You can then retire your bill, and get the discount if you like. The shares will be safe to go up to £10 after such a whacking dividend is paid, and then you can sell out if you get nervous over them. However, please yourself. I won't over-persuade you ; only if you don't like to take the parcel, say the word, and give me time to find a mark for them. I won't let them slip, never fear. I want to run over to the Joint Stock Bank before it shuts up. You can make up your mind while I am gone.

For ten minutes or so Martin sat in a peculiar state of mental irresolution, like a little naked boy shivering at his shower-bath on a frosty morning. When Blocks returned he saw at a glance that Martin was still undecided, so he said, "I think you had better not buy those shares to hold, Mac, as you seem so funky over them. But I tell you what ; I can sell them for £8. I met a mark for them just now, outside the bank door. I will go down and close for them before the time is up, and we will share the £50 we shall clear out of the transaction. That will be just as good to me as my commission. What do you say to that little easy transaction ?"

"Hum—ah ! I don't care about jobbing in shares, Blocks. As I told you before, I am anxious to invest my money safely, and then to settle down quietly. I don't think I can do wrong in taking the 200, if they are so firm in the market. I don't want to miss a good chance."

"I am sure you will be right, Mac. There is no sham

or tiddlewinking about the Peak Downs property—my word!"

"I will take them Blocks," said Martin, boldly. "One thousand pounds cash, and my bill at four months for the balance."

"All right, old fellow! Come with me, and we'll settle the thing off hand, and then I'll shout a bottle of Cawarra."

The bargain was soon completed, and Blocks and Martin then went to the Oxford to refresh. While taking a glass of wine together they were joined by a spirited speculator who seemed very desirous of going into good copper. He offered Martin £8 8s. for his Peak Downs, half cash, and the other half in shares in a rich gold claim, next but two to the famous Solferino claim. Martin declined the offer, but it helped to strengthen his confidence in the stability of his last and largest investment.

Martin took the Lovers' Walk, Hyde Park, on his route to Redfern, for the sake of quietude, for he was nauseated with the din and dust of the city streets. As he slowly strolled along that romantic avenue, his mind was actively reviewing his speculations for that day, and the prospects of his investments on the whole. It was a comfort to him that he had secured 200 Peak Downs at 5s. under the market value; but the glad feeling was almost instantly dulled by the second thought, that he might have bought them a few weeks before for £6, if he had not been so irresolute.

"Ah, well," he sighed, "I cannot foresee things, and it is useless to worry myself about errors of judgment

that are beyond the reach of a remedy. I have cause to be highly gratified with my investments altogether. I have gone into companies that are directed by men of influence and honour, and I believe I am safe. If the Peak Down copper and the Tabernacle Hill tin should only return half the dividends they are expected to do, my income from all sources will be more than £4,000 a-year. Ha ! ha ! a comfortable independence for a little nabob ! I shall be able to pay off all my old debts in Melbourne in less than twelve months, and have ample funds for my current expenses besides."

He then began to reflect on the happiness in store for him, in being able to prove to all Australia that he was an upright man ; and he felt a warm glow in his breast — like poet's glory — as his fancy's eye foresaw commendatory notices of his honest liquidation, in the Victorian newspapers, headed, "Another praiseworthy example !" or "Noble conduct of Mr. M'Tailing !"

" Well, after all my ups and downs on life's highway, I may consider myself a fortunate man," continued Martin, soliloquisingly, and he sat down beneath an oak tree to lengthen out his pleasing reverie. " Here am I at forty-eight—or life's prime—in the possession of a fortune, made by a few lucky hits of judgment—a sum total which millions of plodding old merchants have not accumulated, after a long career of trade. I have the prospect of enjoying, say thirty years of happiness, and I hope of usefulness, in the world. Ha ! ha ! You are a lucky fellow, Martin ! "

He next thought of Mrs. Carney, and all her charms,

and of her two bright boys, whom he hoped to be instrumental in training up to be men of mark in the land. Perhaps he also thought of their little brothers and sisters to come. It was natural. Presently he began to feel chilly, so he rose up and walked briskly homeward, with his mind quite made up that he would begin to enjoy himself, now that all his bother about investing his capital was happily over.

Every bachelor knows that there are little special matters to look to just before he gets married. Martin was not unmindful of any needful preliminary ; indeed, he seemed to be bestowing as much calm thought on his outfit as if he were going on a voyage home *via* Cape Horn. His wedding suit was sent home punctually, and it fitted to a nicety. His bootmaker had been equally successful in pleasing him. But his barber annoyed him excessively, by cutting his hair close to the scalp, in the newest fashion. It was rude of the young Carneys to laugh at his close crop, when he came home. He mentally vowed that he would teach them better manners in a week or two, with the help of a stick if necessary.

At length his wedding morn arrived. He saw the sunrise upon it with cheering brightness, and he felt as happy as might be expected. Mrs. Carney had managed everything with exquisite tact, and not a soul, save Judith and the dressmaker, knew aught about what was going to transpire. The boys went off to school after breakfast, as usual, and by the 11 a.m. train their mother went off to Parramatta. Martin had gone thither by the 9 a.m. boat. They met at the chosen pastor's residence,

and there they were united, quietly, yet indissolubly. After the ceremony they started by rail for Richmond, and had a first-class carriage all to themselves. Martin was charmed with the unostentatious arrangements of his prudent partner, and he was equally surprised and delighted at the marvellous simplicity of matrimonial economy, so far as his experience had gone.





CHAPTER XVI.

FEROCIOUS OBJECTIONS OF MRS. CARNEY'S FAMILY TO HER UNION WITH MARTIN.

WHEN the Carney boys came home at tea-time they missed their mother, and they naturally inquired where she was. Judith had an indulgent conscience, so she told them their mamma was gone to nurse Aunt Paul, at Petersham, and she would not be back for a day or two.

"Why didn't 'ma tell us that auntie was sick?" asked the elder boy, in a sullen tone.

"She did not know it until after you had gone to school, Master Saul. She told me to give you this florin, and to tell you to be good boys till she came back."

"All right!" cried both boys at once; and then they began to fight for the treasurership of the florin, until Judith settled the dispute by getting change and dividing the money fairly between them. After tea they thought they might take advantage of their liberty by making a supply of toffee, and notwithstanding the strong protest of Judith against their making a mess in her kitchen, and her reminder that they burnt a hole in the saucepan the last time they made toffee, they were

resolute. Toffee they would have, and they besieged the cupboard for raw material. Judith emphatically warned them that their 'ma would be shocked at the way they wasted the sugar and butter, but they declared they did not care—" 'ma would not know it unless she was told of it." They made a heavy boiling of toffee, and poured it out to cool in the largest-size flat dish on the dresser; but in dislodging the sticky mass they broke the dish, and when Judith scolded they stroked her face with a sugary spoon, to pacify her.

Many children have found that it is possible to have too much of a good thing. The Carney boys were gluttons for toffee, and they paid the usual penalty for excess. For three days they were too sick to go to school, and Judith had a tiresome time of it with them. Her soft appeals to their better feelings and her threatenings to tell their 'ma were alike ineffectual in checking their peevishness or their rampant mischief. When at length she told them that she could not possibly bear their racket any longer, for she was getting ill, and she must go home to her father at Appin, they bade her go home directly; and Master Davy offered to run for a cab to take her and her luggage to the station. When she cried at their cruelty, they mocked her whining tone and called it cat music. In short, they seemed to be wantonly bent upon driving the poor girl crazy; and she told the milkman—who was her confidential friend—that "she would ten times sooner be shut up in his cowshed than stop in the house with them two young Rooshun bears."

"I am glad to see that you are much better this morning, Master Saul and Master Davy," said Judith,

coaxingly, on the fourth morning after her mistress's departure. "You have eaten a hearty breakfast, and that is a good sign. You will go to school now, like good boys, won't you?"

"No fear! We are not well enough to go to school to-day," replied Saul, boldly, and then he asked, "When is 'ma coming home, Judith?"

"Not for three or four days more, Master Saul."

"Ugh! bother it all! You told us she would come back in a day or two," said Davy, with an angry scowl.

"And when is old Bristlehead coming back, I wonder?" asked Saul.

"Hush! You should not call Mr. M'Tailing such a nasty name, Master Saul; I am sure he is a very pleasant gentleman. Listen to me now, both of you. I am going to tell you something that will delight you. I am sure it will. No, no—it is nothing about Chinese squibs. Hearken, and I will tell you all about it." Judith put on a smirky air, and the boys stood by looking at her with a sort of sullen curiosity.

"Well, what are you going to tell us? Out with it, Sally!"

"Don't be so fractious, Master Davy! and please don't call me Sally again. Now, then, sit down for a minute or two and listen, like good boys. Your dear mamma is gone away to get married."

"What!" shouted both boys together, as if her words had electrified them.

"Gone to Parramatta to be married to Mr. M'Tailing. You will have a new father now. Won't it be nice? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Married to that bandy-legged old Guy Fawkes!" yelled Saul. "Get out, you stupid! You have been dreaming."

"It's true as death: 'pon my word and honour."

"If it's true, I'll kill him for marrying my 'ma," vociferated Davy, and he dashed his school-bag under the table in a pet.

"Mercy 'pon us! I am shocked at you, Master Davy!" said Judith; "and at you, too, Master Saul. You are both going cranky, I do believe. I expected this news would have made you jump for joy."

"Yah! shut up, or I'll make you hop for grief. Why didn't you tell us on the morning 'ma went off, and let us go and stop her?" shouted Saul, in a complete rage. "You cat! you rat—you old Judy!"

"How dare you call me such abominable names, sir?" said Judith firing up a bit. "I won't put up with your impudence any longer. Go to school this instant moment, you disgraceful boys!"

Instead of obeying her imperious command, they simultaneously made a cowardly push at the girl, and sent her reeling into the farthest corner of the room.

Judith had a fair share of spirit when it was roused, and she showed it all on that occasion. She sprang up from the corner in an instant, and seized a broom in self-defence. She knew well how to handle a broom from long practice, and she whirled it about with such dexterity and sureness of aim, that the boys were soon glad to escape from the house. Ten minutes afterwards, they might have been seen on their way to Uncle Drench's house, with tears running down their cheeks. Saul was

limping from a severe bruise on his right knee, and another bruise on his left hip, and Davy had a bleeding lump on the crown of his head as big as a ripe nectarine, besides other minor contusions which were not so convenient for him to exhibit.

Aunt Drench had no boys of her own, and she had always made pets of her nephews. They were also in high favour with their rompish cousins, Rachel and Flora, so it was a good place to go to for sympathy when they were in disgrace at home, which was pretty often. The Drench family were all prone to tittle-tattling, and mischief-making, and Mrs. Carney always dreaded their influence on her sons. The boys were relating in their own innocent way the ferocious attack of Judith, with a Fijian club, when Uncle Drench came home, and his wrath was so excited at the first sight of the wounded lads, that the united entreaties of his wife and daughters could scarcely restrain him from rushing out and getting Judith apprehended on a charge of attempted murder.

"But what induced your mother to go and leave her home and children in charge of such a Jezebel?" He asked the question in a savage tone, and paused for an answer.

"Judith says that 'ma has gone off to Parramatta to be married to old M'Tailing," whined Saul.

If a runaway horse, with a butcher's cart behind him, had suddenly dashed through the parlour window into the room at that moment, it would hardly have caused more sensation than did Saul's brief report. Shocked is too faint a word to express their condition; they were

all stunned, and for a minute they seemed to be struck gentle, for neither of them uttered a word.

But the gentleness was an illusion. Aunt Drench was the first to recover the use of her tongue, and she did use it with a vengeance. In jagged sentences she denounced Martin as a mean, scurvy usurper of an unfortunate dead man's place, and of his poor orphans' rights ; and it was a shame on the country that there was not a law to punish all such domestic swindling. She stopped to take breath, and then began again, an octave lower : " My poor, honest-hearted brother toiled and worked till the day of his death, to scrape together a little property for his darling boys, and his unnatural widow has gone and let this scarecrow of a fellow—this Victorian runaway rogue—step into poor Joseph's shoes. It is monstrous ! By and bye, we shall no doubt see a houseful of miserable little brats, pampered and petted and fattened on my late brother's substance, and his own two lawful boys treated like pigs—perhaps basely murdered, I shouldn't wonder ! This is the beginning of their sufferings, poor dears ! Look at them now, scarcely able to crawl. Their mother ought to be publicly whipped for leaving them to the mercy of that savage servant. Ugh ! I have no patience left for Maria ! I'll tell her my mind the minute I meet with her, as sure as I am born."

" And I will tell M'Tailing my mind," said Mr. Drench, as he paced the room excitedly. " I mean to say he is no better than a midnight thief ; and I don't care who hears me say it. He has found out by sly means that poor, simple-minded Joe had left all his property to the sole care and control of his giggling

wife,—but for the benefit of his children, of course—and the shabby rogue has walked into a snug home ready made, and who is to stop him now from doing what he likes in it? He is a robber of these fatherless lads, and I will tell him so to his face. Dash him! If I were not a man of peace, I'd go to Parramatta this very night and pull his nose."

"It would serve him right if you did, 'pa,'" said Rachel, a lanky damsel of twenty summers and winters. "I never could bear the fellow from the first moment I set eyes on him. He never could look me straight in the face, and I put him down for a sly silvery-tongued hypocrite when I heard him praising the boys to aunt, and promising to teach them Latin and Greek. Ah, I'd Greek him if I had my will!"

"The monster had the impudence to squeeze my fingers the evening he saw me home from Davy's birthday party," said Flora, who had been rummaging her memory for some damaging item to aim at poor innocent Martin, and at last had invented a common little fib.

"Squeeze your fingers, did he? The scamp! Why did you not tell me at the time, Flory? I would have had him up for an assault." As her father hissed out the threat he looked as if he would be proud of any pretext for hanging the delinquent.

After the whole family had vented off the extreme pressure of their indignation they gradually softened down, and the girls then began to concoct playful freaks for making Martin's life miserable when he came home from his honeymoon tour. The boys forgot their wounds,

and entered into the mischievous devices of their cousins with impish delight. Sundry entirely new practical jokes were planned, with much giggling appreciation, until Mr. Drench felt constrained to remind them that it was not charitable or Christian-like conduct. That solemn admonition checked the display of their schemes, but it did not alter their determination, to do all in their power to make M'Tailing rue the hour that he usurped the mastership of Leatherkin Cottage. It was decided that the boys should not go home again till their mother returned, and the spare attic room was prepared for their occupation.

That night, as the Haymarket clock was striking the hour of twelve, Judith was awakened by a hideous face peeping in at her window, and groaning thrice, "Hooaw! hooaw! hooaw!" Her screaming alarmed the neighbours, and the policeman on duty broke into the house. He found Judith lying on her bedroom floor in a fit. When she came to her senses again she said that a dreadful goblin had appeared to her, and she begged to be carried out of the house immediately. No persuasion would induce her to remain in it, so she was taken to the grocer's shop opposite, and the policeman locked up the cottage, and promised to watch it till morning.



CHAPTER XVII.

MORE FIERCE OBJECTORS TO MARTIN'S MARRIAGE.

TWO minutes after the newsboy cried "Paper!" at the front gate, Mr. Blough startled his wife —who was preparing for breakfast—by shouting, "Bella!" There was urgency implied in his abrupt summons, so she flew outside to see what was the matter with him.

"Look at this scandalous job!" said Mr. Blough, and he handed his wife the *Sydney Morning Herald*, with his thumb on the marriage list in the front corner. He then shuffled rapidly up and down the verandah in his slippers, rubbing his hands and making his knuckles crack like blazing pine-sticks.

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Mrs. Blough, as she read over a short advertisement of the marriage of her brother to Mrs. Carney. She dropped the paper and sat down on a rustic stool, a deeply slighted sister, lacking words to express her lacerated feelings.

"My last dream is out now, Bella. I knew that something of a disastrous character was about to befall your brother. My dreams always have some meaning in them." Mr. Blough had dreamt, two nights before, that

he saw Martin sink in a ship at anchor in the harbour, with all his money in his pocket. "Poor silly loon! He has allowed himself to be bewitched by that artful widow, and victimized. She'll skin him. I know the dame of old; and I never augured any good of your brother going to lodge with her, though I did not like to say anything to discourage you in your charitable doings."

"O, dear me!" sighed Mrs. Blough, as soon as she was composed enough for the effort. "The ingratitude of the world is appalling. To serve that designing woman in her neediness, I recommended Martin to go and board with her, and this is the return she makes for my kind consideration. But I confess I ought to have known better than to send a simple-souled creature like him into a lioness's den. I shall never forgive myself for ruining his prospects for life, poor fellow!"

"He is an idiot. That's the plainest way to express it. To go and marry a great goose-headed woman, with two skulking urchins of sons. He has settled himself—there is no mistake about that, poor wretch! I pity him, fool as he is; for he has a life of misery before him."

"Whatever could he see in the woman to fancy, I can't think. He is an intellectual man, and she is a complete gaby. But it's all her wicked manceuvring, I am certain; he would never have thought of such a thing if she had not asked him. She is an artful woman, and has wheedled him into her meshes, and now she'll impoverish him, in spite of all his near and dear relatives can do to help it. It is his money she is after—nothing else. She knows that he is rich. Can we do

anything to stop the marriage going any further, Blough?"

"Tut! stop a hurricane! Martin is insane on that point. There is no doubt in my mind about that fact, but we should have a difficulty to prove it, even if insanity would be held as a satisfactory plea in the new Divorce Court. No, we can't stop it, Bella, so we had best say as little as possible about the affair, or folks will be sure to say we are actuated by selfish motives, and we shall get laughed at. I wish him luck; that's all I have to say about it."

"I certainly did hope that our dear little Martin would have been benefited by his uncle's wealth; but that hope is crushed now. His wife will take good care that none of his money goes out of her paws—trust her for that. Well, I feel quite ill with this sudden shock. I shall not be able to eat a bit all day."

Mr. Blough had also encouraged hopes not only of his little son's advancement through his uncle's means, but of his own commercial rise. He had a mining partnership scheme to propose to Martin, in which he foresaw immense personal advantages to be derived from his brother-in-law's capital and credit. Now he feared the scheme would be frustrated by the influence of Martin's wife, who had been Blough's secret enemy ever since a District Court suit between him and her late husband about a set of cart harness. His little son's prospects, too, were blighted in the bud, for Martin would probably have a family of his own to provide for—at any rate her boys would come in for heavy pickings. Mr. Blough was savage; still he deemed it prudent to keep his

feelings in check for the present. There was no profitable end to be served by open hostility, and some little gleanings might possibly be gained by a smoother policy ; so he stifled his wrath, and sat down to breakfast, with a spoiled appetite.

The Drench family had also scanned the front corner of the *Herald* before breakfast (which confirmed Judith's statement to the boys), and they expressed their sentiments more bitterly than the Bloughs had done. There was this difference, however, that the Drenches all condemned Martin for inveigling the widow for her money, and put him down as a designing knave, scarcely a whit more moral than the Carl kidnappers.

On the same morning the marriage of old Joe Carney's widow was the talk of all the gossips in Redfern, and various opinions were expressed concerning it ; none of them at all complimentary to the persons concerned. A good many matrons were shocked at her indecency at getting married only eleven months after her poor husband's death ; and it was a solemn hint to some reflective husbands against leaving their savings to the sole control of their wives, and thus exposing them, as widows, to the tempting trickery of fortune-hunting adventurers. Many inquiries were made respecting Mr. M'Tailing's antecedents, for he was very little known in that locality, and some of the reports current about him were most unfavourable to his reputation. It was the general opinion that he had married the widow for the sake of her property, and much pity was expressed for her poor boys, who were being robbed of their rights in the wickedest way possible. The event did not seem to give

satisfaction in any quarter, except to a few rude boys, who anticipated a lark with tin kettles on the return of the happy pair.

Judith so far recovered from her fright after sunrise, that she was willing to return to Leatherkin Cottage. Daylight has a powerful influence in dispelling human dread of supernatural objects. Still, she refused to stop in the house unless the grocer's wife allowed her daughter to go and keep her company. Judith had ascertained that Masters Saul and David were at their uncle Drench's house, and she hoped they would stop there; but she did not know that they had carried such a damaging report of her brooming them down in defence of her own life and limbs. She went to work to clean the house from bottom to top, and, as she expressed it, to "get everything in honeymoon order by the time her master and mistress came back." But she was a good deal hindered in her duties by the calls of neighbours to know all the news, and she felt not a little honoured at being able to tell them that she knew all about what was going to happen, days before it appeared in the newspapers.

When Martin, from his soft nest among the mountains of Kurrajong, sent the advertisement of his marriage to the *Sydney Herald*, he did it for the sake of gently breaking the news to his city friends, and thus sparing himself and his bride some embarrassment on their return to society. He had no idea that their relatives, on both sides of the family, were so rampantly opposed to the match, or that the public of Redfern had such strong feelings in the matter. It is one of the numberless

sweeteners of life's cup that we do not know all that cross people say about us behind our backs. Martin was in happy ignorance of the abuse that was being heaped upon him, and there, in the rural peacefulness of that flowery region, he rambled about in sublime enjoyment, which many of my readers, I hope, can realize better than I can describe it. It was delightful to sit under the shadow of a fern tree and hear the birds whistle among the green trees in the valleys and on the mountain slopes, and at the same time to have a lawful lady-bird by his side warbling love into both ears, or entertaining him with nice little stories of her school days. His Maria, though 33 years of age—perhaps more—was as lively as a young lassie ; indeed, as she herself expressed it, she felt as if she were back again to her seventeenth spring. Her affected juvenility, though charming to Martin, was at times attended with risk to herself, for, in skipping across a bubbling water-course in chase of a butterfly, she forgot that she had grown heavy, and plumped into the stream. But Martin pulled her out again in a minute, and there was no harm done save a wetting to her waistband, and they laughed all the way back to their lodgings. Such fun they had during that fortnight, all to themselves, as he had never seen the like of before.

Maria had no lack of ideas, of a simple class ; her reading had been extremely limited, but her memory for family history and town talk was amazing. For the first week of their country life she was never at a loss for a subject to talk about, and Martin would sit and listen for hours together to her lisping details of her early home

life, and of all her domestic joys and sorrows, from the summer evening when the late Joseph Carney came shyly courting her at her mother's back fence, until the mournful afternoon when he was carried out of their cottage to Haslem's Creek. Her biographical sketch of her late partner took her a whole day to deliver, and it proved the tenderness of her disposition as well as the stretch of her talking power. Martin did not enjoy such disclosures ; still, he was too polite to show his indifference, and his patient attention encouraged her to go on to the dismal close up. Her Joseph was—by her partial showing—a man of few words, but a silent thinker ; and, had he lived, he would doubtless have taken an honoured stand among our colonial poets. She had two books of manuscript poems that were all composed by him as he sat at his work-bench, making harness. She had brought one of the books of MS. poems in her bag, as she thought Martin might like to look at it now he had leisure.

Martin could not say nay to anything that his gushing bride proposed, so the book was carried out on their next rural walk, and he sat on a rock under a gum tree and read it aloud to his admiring companion, from beginning to end. The first poem was headed, "Lines on a Pigskin that was made into a Side-saddle for a Grand Lady." The next composition was "An Ode on the Bellows in our Church Organ." After he had finished reading the precious book, Martin remarked that there was originality in the conception of some of the subjects ; and that equivocal praise so pleased his wife that she promised to let him see the second MS.

volume ("Sturm's Reflections done into Blank Verse"), after they got home.

She said "Poor Joseph considered his rendering of Sturm as his grand masterpiece and his life's effort; but he did not live to do more than a sixth of it; so I suppose it will never be published, unless one of the dear boys should take it up, by and bye, out of respect for his poor father's memory."

Martin made one or two delicate endeavours, in the course of their honeymoon rusticating, to draw his wife's mind out from its cribbed compass into the expansive world of nature, but he was not at all successful in his efforts. Botany she playfully called "stuff and nonsense," and his preliminary remarks on the wonders of entomological science made her shudder. She could not bear insects about her, she said, and she rompishly pulled his beard to stop him from getting too serious. He smiled pleasantly at her little whimsicalities, though he felt sorry that she did not show a greater desire for useful knowledge. However, he did not despair of doing her good by slow degrees. He believed that she had capacity of mind, which only wanted to be judiciously switched on to the incline to wisdom's heights; and by and bye he would convince her that an intelligent examination into some of the millions of wonderful things in the book of Nature, or in the books of wise men, would furnish infinitely more delight and instruction than a constant feeding on the emasculating pabulum of domestic chit-chat and gossip's gabble.

But there is a limit to all sublunary joys; and as their honeymoon tour drew towards its close they began to be

rather more prosy in their conversation, and a trifle less frisky in their manner. Martin minutely expounded his ways and means, and furthermore told her of his design to pay off all his old debts in Melbourne, out of his first year's income. Maria thought that his creditors ought to think themselves lucky if they got half their debts paid to them. Martin replied that he supposed they would think themselves lucky if they got anything at all, for the law would not allow them to claim it from him, rich as he was, but he had a strong desire to pay every farthing he owed in the world. He could do that, and still have a handsome sum to spend. He then talked about taking a nice house at Burwood, and keeping a trap to drive about in. Maria objected to the common phrase "trap," and suggested that "britzka," sounded much nicer. Martin quite agreed with her. But she had a strong reluctance to leave the cottage at Redfern, on account of old, endearing associations, so he promised to build another storey to the cottage and a wing at the western end for the library, and a stable and coach-house at the bottom of the garden. She thought that would be delightful. When all that, and sundry minor domestic matters had been discussed, and arranged to their mutual satisfaction, he further disclosed to her his plans for the future useful employment of his time and talent. He purposed taking an active part in some of the latest philanthropic movements in the city, including the current educational agitation. He considered it a reproach and a shame on the respectable community, that so many poor boys and girls should be running wild about the streets, totally uneducated, and growing up in

the knowledge of all kinds of mischief, while conflicting denominations were arguing over the merits of their respective systems of school management, and the strength of their claims on the public funds. But what pleased Maria more than all was Martin's promise to devote a certain portion of his time every day to the "coaching" of her two dear boys for their matriculation at the University. She said that was very kind of him.

Martin will never forget that gorgeous sunset, on the last evening he spent at Kurrajong, nor the touching pathos with which his Maria sung that plaintive song, "Farewell to the Mountain and the Sun-Lighted Vale," as they strolled pensively back to their lodging-house, after their last, loving, rural ramble.

The next day they started for Sydney.





CHAPTER XVIII.

RATHER SENSATIONAL.

MHEN the bride and bridegroom returned to their home by the evening train, they found that Judith had made various pleasing preparations for their reception. In some of the more tasteful household arrangements she had been assisted by Mrs. Drench and her daughters. This will perhaps be wondered at by the pure-minded reader, after the decided hostility which that entire family manifested when they first heard of the wedding. But such startling anomalies are not rare in social life. It is not at all uncommon for some members of a family to practise deceit and hypocrisy to other members of it; to show a smiling face and to speak loving words, while their hearts are full of envy and all uncharitableness. The helpful demonstrations of the Drenches was a part of their subtle policy; and the boys being at home, dressed in their best clothes, to welcome their mother and their new stepfather, was another deceitful phase of the mischievous programme which had been devised by the united arts of that lively family.

When Mr. Drench was venting the pressure of his wrath on first hearing the news from the boys, he had hinted, as a summing up, that "there were other ways of cooking a goose than currying it." His words had a sinister reference to sly revenge upon Martin. Incited by that remark of the head of the household, Mrs. Drench and her daughters, and her two nephews, had all put their heads together, and, amidst much uproarious laughing and giggling at the fun of the thing, they concocted a nice little sensational pantomime, for the enlivenment of the bridal pair on their return home ; and some special hits for Martin, by way of playfully serving him out for his impudence in sneaking into their respectable family circle. But to prevent suspicion from lodging upon any of them, they agreed, one and all, to be very soft and civil to him, and to conceal their disgust at his mercenary doings. The boys gleefully entered into the spirit of the lark ; but no amount of coaxing, nor any pleas of expediency could induce them to agree to call him father. "Not a bit of it," was their dogged reply. "He is not our father, and we will never own him."

Mrs. M'Tailing was delighted to see her sons again, and she gave them some hearty maternal hugs, and shed a few natural tears over them. Martin shook hands with them warmly, and said, "I am glad to see you again, my dear boys." He also gave them each a parcel of handsome books, which he had bought at Parramatta. His presents made them look glad ; and Martin, in the kindness of his heart, whispered to his Maria, that they really were fine boys, and he felt proud of them. They all sat down to the table looking quite happy. After tea was

over, and while the boys were examining the books, and Martin was descanting on the merits of the authors of them, Maria went into the kitchen to have a little confidential chat with Judith on domestic affairs in general. She was not only surprised but quite shocked when the girl told her, as soon as she went out, that she wished to go away that night for good.

"Why, Judith, you have quite upset me," said her mistress, in a tone of pathetic remonstrance. "Just when I come home, and expect everything to go on smoothly and comfortably, to find you so dissatisfied is more than I expected. Whatever is the reason you want to leave me so suddenly."

"I dursn't stop another night in the house, ma'm," replied Judith, beginning to cry. "I can't stop, indeed, ma'm."

"Why not stop? Explain what you mean directly. What are you crying for?"

"Well, ma'm, I have seen a ghost in the house."

"A ghost! Nonsense, you silly girl! Don't tell me such stuff. I have no patience with you."

"It's as true as I'm alive, ma'm. I saw it three nights running, at my bedroom window; and it made a horrid noise."

"Phoo! It was a cat, I dare say. What was it like at all?"

"It was like an old man, ma'm, with a face as white as that wall, and a voice like a horse. Oh, dear me! I wouldn't sleep in that room again by myself not for a hundred thousand guineas, ma'm."

It would be tiresome to report the excited colloquy

of the terrified maid and her mistress, that lasted for an hour or more. Judith was firm in her statement about the ghost, despite her mistress's expressed belief that it was all rubbish. She declared that she would rather be killed on the spot than go into her bedroom again at night, so it was eventually agreed that she should sleep on the drawing-room sofa for a night or two, until some other arrangement could be made. I may mention that she did not say a word to her mistress about the misdoings of Saul and Davy. Her conscience had softly told her that she had hit the boys too hard with the broomstick, for she had shed blood; and she had misgivings that she laid herself open to the penalties of the law for so doing; so she resolved to say nothing about the misbehaviour of the boys unless they impeached her, and then she would make out her own case as strongly as possible.

Mrs. M'Tailing did not wish to disturb her husband's mind with domestic ruffles on the first night of his home life, so she did not tell him anything about Judith's silly whims and fancies. After a light supper they all retired to rest.

Sometime after midnight Maria was aroused from her slumbers by a dismal noise, which seemed to come from the chimney corner. She listened with fear and trembling, and presently heard her name, Maria, distinctly pronounced, in a hollow, sepulchral tone, and then three deep groans. Thrice her name was called, and thrice the groans were repeated. It was quite natural that she should feel terrified, but her presence of mind did not wholly forsake her, for she did not shriek out nor make any

effort to arouse Martin, who was sleeping soundly. An awful conviction rushed into her mind that it was the voice of her late husband, and she thought it was best not to let Martin know anything of the mysterious visitations, if she could possibly help it, for there was no knowing what effect it might have on his nervous nature.

She lay quite awake all through the night, but she heard nothing more worth noting. Soon after breakfast she walked over to Cousin Drench's house, for she felt that she must unburden her mind to some one. There was no one at home but Mrs. Drench, who was glad to see her—or she said she was; and she sat and listened very attentively while Maria told all about the startling occurrence overnight, and also Judith's report of the strange figure she had thrice seen at her bedroom window. Mrs. Drench seemed to be awfully affected by the disclosure, and required much pressing from Maria to induce her to express an opinion on the mysterious affair. At length she said, that she believed it was the ghost of poor, dear Joseph, which was disquieted on account of his widow prematurely taking to herself another husband, and without acquainting her sons of her design.

"Gracious! Do you really think so, dear?" said Maria.

"Yes, I do, indeed; for I have heard of ghostly interference in such affairs before. It is my belief that you will have no peace in that house for a month to come; for it is only just eleven months since poor Joseph was buried. You ought to have waited for a year and a day before you married again, Maria, and then it would have

been all right, and perhaps nobody would have grumbled at you."

"Bless me! I didn't know that that was the law, Rachel."

"It is the custom, my dear, in decent society. You ask for my opinion, you know, so I give it you plainly. If I were you, I would wait for two nights more, and see if the ghostly visit is repeated; if it is, then I think you had better let your cottage for a month or two, just as it stands, and take a house out of town, ready furnished. Drench might let your cottage for you."

"Why could I not take my own furniture with me, Rachel?"

"By no means take a stick out of the house, my dear. The ghost will be sure to follow it. I know a little about the ways of such things, through studying Mrs. Crowe's book."

* * * * *

That night, just as the clock in the hall struck twelve, Maria heard what sounded to her like a short giggling laugh, but it was immediately succeeded by similar horrible groans that she had heard before, and again her name was thrice called. Martin was not so soundly asleep as he had been on the previous night, and the strange sounds awoke him. On inquiring of his terrified wife what was the matter, she told him what she had previously heard, and what Judith had seen; and also told him what Mrs. Drench's opinion was of the mysterious occurrences.

Maria was surprised to find that Martin was not over much startled by her disclosure. She knew that he was

a nervous man, for she had seen him blush and tremble before three or four innocent girls ; nay, he had even trembled in her presence, before they were closely acquainted, and she had an idea that anything of a ghostly nature would scare him out of his wits. But Martin had ten times more real courage than many bombastic fellows have, who could impudently stare a room full of modest girls out of countenance. He was not a total disbeliever in ghosts, but his reflections had convinced him that the majority of cases on record of supernatural visitations, were either mere delusions or else the mischievous pranks of practical jokers. He struck a light and partly dressed himself ; while doing so, he smelt a strong fume of tobacco in the room, and he asked "Do either of your boys smoke, Maria ? "

"No, no, dear. Not at all. But—but—poor Joseph used to smoke."

Martin felt assured that it was not poor Joseph who was smoking then, and he began to trace the source of the fumes. After a while he discovered one end of a tin speaking tube, about eighteen inches up the chimney flue. He knew there was another end to the tube, and he felt convinced that he would find it somewhere in the boys' room above. To allay his wife's ghostly fears, he told her what he suspected : but lest he should create a noisy scene in the house, he deferred his further search for the present. Maria was much relieved to find that it could not be a ghost after all, but she argued that the boys would never be guilty of the wicked joke of frightening their mother, and she believed it was that

horrid Captain Chuff, next door, who had poked his speaking trumpet down the chimney.

The result of Martin's investigation next day was the finding the mouthpiece of the tube, ingeniously concealed behind a picture, which was hanging up in the boys' room ; and on a further search, in a lumber closet in another attic, he found a box containing a variety of curious articles, which were intended to produce sensational effects, including a hideous white mask, which Judith recognized as part of the goblin which had appeared at her window. He also found a large pipe bowl, newly primed with tobacco and brimstone.

In the face of so many evidences of the tricky disposition of her sons, Maria could not uphold their innocence, though her motherly confidence in them was not wholly withdrawn. She expressed her amazement at their wilful misdoings. She would not have believed that they could have been so wicked if anybody had told her, for up to that period they had been very good boys, and she could not imagine what had so suddenly possessed them. When Martin remarked that they deserved to be severely punished for their impish pranks, she acquiesced, and said that they should not have a bit of pudding for a fortnight. When he suggested a good beating with his walking stick, as soon as they came home from school, she looked hurt, and said appealingly, that their own poor dear father had never laid so much as a finger on them in all his life, and she was sure the boys would not like to be beaten with a stick by a new stepfather. She added "I have no doubt in my mind that they merely intended a lark with their box of

ghostly trumpery and the nasty pipe ; but if they had considered over the mischief they might have done in frightening us all out of our lives, they would not have done it, I am sure, for they are very feeling boys. I will talk to them seriously after dinner, my dear, and I hope and trust we shall never again have cause to complain of their misbehaviour. I never knew them to be so rompish before ; indeed they have always been remarkably tractable well-behaved boys."

After tea that evening Martin called Saul and David into his back room, and gave them an address, which he had spent the whole afternoon in composing. It set forth, in language adapted to their capacity, the whole duty of children to their parents and to their lawfully appointed guardians. It touched, as delicately as possible, upon the recent delinquency of his stepsons, and in portentous terms it spoke of the penalties which would follow any future exhibition of a tricky or insubordinate spirit, while they were under that roof. It defined their new relationship, and their mutual, moral, and social obligations and responsibilities—in short, it was as good as a sermon. The concluding paragraph was a fatherly appeal to their feelings—affectionate but very firm ; whilst writing it Martin had dropped a tear or two on his pad, for it was very touching. He trusted it would do the boys good. He delivered the address to them in a serious manner, and was pleased to observe that they looked solemnly affected by it. He shook hands with them after it was over, and they went up to their bedroom in silent order.

The address, affectionate as it was, had really no more

beneficial effect on the young Carneys than a lecture by Dr. Badham on Greek classics would have on the Glebe omnibus cads. When they got to the attic they went through a variety of heathenish antics, all meant to express contempt and warlike opposition. But Martin could not see them, and he retired to rest as complacently as a good parson after preaching a charity sermon.





CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEGINNING OF A PANIC IN THE MINING SHARE MARKET.

WHAT a dull difference there is between a holiday time in the green country and a return to the work of life in a dusty city! When Martin and his bride were plucking wild flowers or chasing butterflies on the Kurrajong hills, they looked far more blithesome than they did when they were beginning to settle down to home duties in Leatherkin Cottage. Martin had nearly threescore letters lying unopened on his writing-desk, and the sight of them fidgeted him. He liked bush flowers better than letters from mining agents. And Maria had no end of little matters to look to about the house. Judith's unmitigated report of the loss and breakage of chattels during the fortnight's absence of her mistress was not so pleasant to listen to as bird music in the bowery glens, and checking over butcher's and baker's accounts was less romantic pastime than sitting under a tree, toying with her placid bridegroom's whiskers.

The spectral occurrences which I have narrated had kept Maria's mind in a state of unpleasant excitement for the two first days after her return, and she was not in the most patient mood for investigating her cupboards, and for beholding, without a grumble, the pillaged condition of her jam and preserve jars, and her sugar bag. All deficiencies and damages were laid to the charge of Masters Saul and Davy, including the many nice things which Judith had given to her friend the milkman, on his evening visits. Maria would fain have scolded Judith for all the mischief, but she was afraid if she did so the girl would start off in a tiff, and hire herself at a sewing-machine shop ; but she made up her mind that she would never again leave her home to a fortnight's ransacking of her sons and an irresponsible maid.

By the way, these sewing-machine tailoring establishments in the city are making mistresses mind what they say to their maid-servants. It is quite right and proper that mistresses should be considerate and kind, and it is equally right and proper for servants to be civil and dutiful, and not to be saucily independent. Girls may perhaps earn more money at machine-sewing than they can do in domestic service. I do not know much about the pay they get, but it is questionable to me if the machine-work will make such tidy wives of them by and bye. If I were a young fellow on the look-out for a wife, and I happened to tumble in love with a machinist, I certainly would find out, before I popped the question, if she had had sufficient schooling in domestic affairs before she took to machine-work, and if not I would look out elsewhere.

Martin had taken a little back room for his study, and he intended to have it fitted up to his fancy as a temporary sanctum, until the proposed new wing to the cottage was built. The boys went off to school, looking very serious, on the morning after Martin had addressed them. He felt encouraged to hope that he had done them good. He then went to his room and began to open his letters. Many of them were prospectuses of new mining companies, and all wonderfully promising; but they were thrown into the waste basket, as was also a prospectus of a new dairy company. The notices of calls on shares were not to be disposed of so easily; and there were other letters of importance, which required his personal attention immediately, so he dressed himself, kissed his wife, sighed once or twice, and then started into town, with a foreboding in his mind that the news he heard that day would not all be of a pleasant nature.

He called first on the legal manager of the Northern Bullseye Copper Company, to pay up two calls on his contributors' shares; and he then learnt that the directors had dismissed their old mining manager because he had neglected to find any copper ore, after driving a tunnel into the mountain's brow twice as far as Mr. Sprightly's section had defined the thickest lode to be. The tunnel cost a good many hundred pounds, and it was neither useful nor ornamental to the property. They had appointed a new manager—a clever Cornish man—who had begun to sink a main shaft on the top of the mountain, which he declared was the way the previous manager would have gone to work if he

had been up to the mark as a miner. The legal manager admitted that the shares had fallen considerably, in consequence of the tunnel turning out nothing but gravel; but he said the claim was still as valuable as it ever was, for not an ounce of ore had been taken from it, and for his part he did not feel at all discouraged. The directors, with the exception of one, who was a sulky man, had pluckily resolved to hold on to their shares, and to go on sinking and cross-cutting until they came to something worth smelting.

Martin paid his calls, and the legal manager gave him a receipt, and said he was much obliged. He was a very polite legal manager, and well worth his pound a week, for he gave contributors no peace till they paid up the calls. Martin felt somewhat depressed at the news of the fall in the shares; and he went straightway to M'Cullum Brothers' office, and instructed them to sell out his wife's shares at cost price, or even a shadow less, for he feared she would begin to worry about them. M'Cullum, junior, promised to do his best to find a buyer, but he thought the copper market was rather dull at present. He had no doubt, however, that the Northern Bullseye shares would look up again, as soon as a payable lode was struck. The Southern Bullseye shares, he said, had had a tremendous fall; in short, shares of all kinds had a downward tendency, but he hoped they would rally again when the public spirit grew more lively.

Martin next went to Mr. Sparrow's office. He found that gentleman much excited over a letter he had received by that morning's post from Mr. Jerry Buttons.

It appeared that Jerry had grown weary of waiting for the floating of the Siamese Twins, with a capital of £40,000, so he began to work his own ten-acre lot, without any other capital than the united strength of himself and his son Joe. His letter showed a defiant spirit towards his Sydney co-partners.

"Then, are we to conclude that the Siamese Twins is a failure?" asked Martin, turning very pale, for he saw nearly the half of his computed yearly income fading away, like a dissolving picture.

"Not a bit of it. Jerry Buttons's agreement is good, both in law and in equity, and I'll hold him to it tightly enough. He has spent all our capital in developing his own lot, and do you think I am going to stand that humbug?"

"O mercy 'pon us! Don't go to law, Mr. Sparrow. At any rate, let me out of the concern before you begin the suit. What will you give for my share?"

"Nothing at all," said Mr. Sparrow, emphatically. "If you and the other lazy brothers had had a particle of push in you, we should not be in this mess. The company would have floated as easily as other things have floated, and we should all be rich men to-day. You cannot back out of the scrape now, Mac. You are one of the provisional directors, you know, and you must bear your share of the legal expenses. That's fair and honest."

Martin groaned heavily. His tongue got as dry as baked tripe, and he sat for some time moodily trying to look at the troubrous prospect before him with manly pluck. The idea of a law suit was terrible to him, but it

was nothing to the misery he felt in having to tell his wife that more than half her marriage settlement was worth nothing at all ; and that her Bullseyes were down to a nominal value. Whatever would she think ? And what would her obstreperous sons do ? What would surly old Drench say ? and what a rogue the world would suspect him of being, in marrying a widow of property and making a settlement on her of valueless shares ! O dear ! O dear ! it was dreadful to contemplate ! In his fanciful view of connubial life, years ago, Martin had always supposed that a man who had a wife to share his sorrows and troubles had just double the moral strength of a lonely bachelor ; but that poetical idea on the subject seemed to have changed in a few short hours. Nothing did he so much dread as the duty of telling his wife of the reverses which had begun to roll over him with the suddenness of an avalanche.

An official rap at the door roused Martin from his dismal reverie. His dry tongue could scarcely articulate "Good morning," to Mr. Sparrow. He rushed out of the office and walked, by the back slums, to Blocks's office, "muttering his wayward fancies" as he went, and gazing down at his boots.

"What's up, Mac ? Have you been run over ?" were Mr. Blocks's hasty inquiries when Martin entered his office, and flopped down into a chair, without taking his hat off. Martin briefly told the cause of his being so uncommonly cut up, and he expected a little sympathy.

"Dash it all ! what's the good of getting in such a funk, Mac ?" said Blocks in a pettish tone. "It is the

like of you that is upsetting the share market and breeding a panic. I have not made a sale for the last week. A month ago I could have got 35s. for every Wattle Dabster I hold, and this morning I have been running my legs off trying to find a buyer at 10s., but it was no go."

"Mercy me ! Are the Wattle Dabsters down ?" asked Martin, and he groaned aloud.

"Down, yes ; everything is down, and I am down, too. I am sick of brokering, and I wish I had never left the hat trade. I shall lose £150 or more by my British Lions, and my Eldorados are ——"

"What ! have the Lions fallen ?" gasped Martin, and he dashed his hat on the table in his excitement.

"Bless them ! they are as useless as dead rats. Not worth a rap."

"O, my ! O, my ! I shall be ruined. Whatever shall I do ? How are Rapp's shares selling, Blocks?"

"Bah ! Don't mention them ! But it is no good swearing. Come and have a glass of ale."

"Tell me, first, how the Peak Downs are looking, Blocks."

"They are healthy enough. That's one comfort."

Martin began to breathe easier ; and he asked what the market price was that day.

"It is no good quoting market prices, for there is no selling anything at present. But holders of Peak Downs are as firm as ever, and I still believe that after the dividend is declared they will go up to £10 ; so hold on to your scrip, and whatever you do don't let anybody hear you crying over it."

"O, dear me ! I wish I had invested in debentures ! Has the great Inverell Tin Company done anything yet, Blocks ? "

"Yes, it has made two calls. I suppose you have had the notices."

"No, I have not ; nor did I anticipate them. Can you sell the shares for me, Richard ?"

"Haven't I told you before that I can't sell anything at the present time ? But you had better go to the legal manager and pay your calls, or you will have a summons in a day or two. I suppose they have lost your address, or you would have got the notices safe enough."

"I wish you had not persuaded me to buy these confounded shares, with calls hanging to them," said Martin, and again he groaned.

"Go to Java !" exclaimed Blocks, angrily. "I did not persuade you to buy them. You were as hot after them as all the other fools, and now you come to me whining like a scalded dog. You are a humbug, Mac."

"Don't be insulting, sir !" said Martin, suddenly jumping up and looking quite ready to fight. "It is bad enough for me to lose my money, without being insulted in this ruffianly style."

In ordinary seasons Mr. Blocks was a civil man. As a hatter no man could have been more affable. But the exciting character of his new occupation had tended to disturb his natural serenity of disposition, and his temper had grown short and sour. A few mollifying words might have soothed poor Martin's mind, but Blocks was more

inclined to say exasperating words, and a regular row ensued. In the heat of the quarrel, Martin uttered libellous words, which were overheard by a broker and his boy in an adjoining office, and Blocks vehemently declared that he would bring an action for damages against Martin, without delay.





CHAPTER XX.

"Domestic happiness ! thou only bliss
Of Paradise that has survived the Fall."—COWPER.



CANNOT explain, in physiological terms, the natural effect of mental worry on the nervous system of a man of delicate organization, nor its mystical influence on his stomach and brain ; but I can vouch for the reality of the phenomena. And poor Martin knew all about it experimentally. He might have been able to tell in simple language the cause of his severe headache and his nervous depression, when he went home to his wife that evening, but he did not wish to explain it, for he had, on their short intimacy, found out that the balance of her mind was easily disturbed, and that if he had any unpleasant news to impart to her, he must do it very gently and gradually, or she would fidget herself into hysterics, and that would set his nerves shaking like cobwebs in a strong breeze.

On his return home, he found his Maria more highly excited than he had ever seen her before ; and she began to tell him the petty details of a squabble she had had that day with her next door neighbour. It appeared that Mrs. Chuff had for some months past persisted in

making one end of her clothes-lines fast to the line posts which were erected on the dividing fence by the late Mr. Carney. There had been several angry disputes about the matter in days of her widowhood, and Maria resolved that, now she had another husband to uphold her, she would take a firm course in stopping the encroachment. Accordingly she had, on that morning, watched from her attic window while Mrs. Chuff hung all her newly-washed linen on the lines, and when they were fairly pegged and fluttering in the wind, Maria went into the yard, stood on a stool, and, without a word of warning, cut down the lines with a carving-knife. Mrs. Chuff was naturally cross at seeing her clean clothes lying on the dirty yard, and a row ensued which I should not like to report. When Captain Chuff came home to his dinner he was savage; and after swearing a good deal at Maria, in common sailor's style, he re-fastened the lines to the posts, and challenged any one to cut them down again on pain of being slaughtered on the spot.

When Saul and Davy came from school in the afternoon, they quite enjoyed the lark of seeing Captain Chuff walking up and down his yard watching his linen lines, with a cannibal's club under his arm, and they gleefully anticipated a sort of sea fight when their stepfather came home, for their mother had promised the angry skipper that Mr. M'Tailing should cut away the lines the very instant he came from town.

"I cannot see what harm the Chuffs' clothes-lines can do to your posts, my dear," said Martin, softly, after his wife had told her story, and appealed to him to defend her rights. "The posts are very strong, you know."

"That's nothing to do with it, my love ; they have no right to use my posts at all. It's like their impudence. Poor dear Carney would have put a stop to it in two minutes. He would never see me imposed upon."

Martin did not like to tell his wife that she had acted in a most unneighbourly manner, though he really thought so. After pondering a minute, with his hand pressed to his hot brow, he said, "Well, Maria, I cannot interfere in this affair to night. I am willing to do anything for peace sake, and I will speak calmly to Captain Chuff about it to-morrow morning."

"Pooh ! speak to him, indeed ! A fat lot of good that would do ! He would only abuse you as he did me. You had better go and cut the lines down now, and I will hold a candle for you. If you don't do it, all the other neighbours will laugh at us, and say you are afraid of old Chuff. Hark ! don't you hear him swearing now ?"

"I am sorry for the annoyance you are put to, Maria, but I really cannot do anything to stop it just now. I have a severe headache, and any excitement would make it worse ; besides, it would be dangerous for me to cut the ropes if the man is standing on the other side of the fence, with a club in his hand. I think I had better go to bed at once."

Away he went to his chamber, and soon afterwards he heard his wife and her two sons having a stormy wrangle across the back palings with Mr. and Mrs. Chuff, while a crowd of outsiders were enjoying the sport. He also heard the captain request Maria to fetch out her flash new husband, and he would knock his head into pumpkin-sauce. Martin felt miserable.

Soon after midnight a crash was heard, almost as startling as the downfall of a crockeryware shop, Maria roused up and screamed. Martin jumped out of bed and struck a light, and then he found that some mischievous person had dropped a kerosene tin, filled with empty gin bottles, down the chimney of their bedroom. Maria vehemently declared that it was that villainous Captain Chuff, and said that if Martin did not take him to the police-court the next day she would do it herself.

"But, my dear, if I lodge a charge against Captain Chuff, I must be prepared to swear that he has committed an offence. I cannot do that, you know. Pray, do be reasonable, my love."

"I am sure you could swear it safely enough, Martin. It is as clear to me as if I had seen him come out of his attic window, and drop the nasty thing down our chimney. The horrid fellow!"

"But you know, dear, that it is just as easy for any one to reach the chimney by getting out of our own attic window."

That remark implied a suspicion that Saul and Davy were the offenders, and Maria combated the opinion with motherly warmth, till Martin's head was all but distractred. He implored her, by all that was tender, not to say any more at present, for he was really unwell, and would give the world to be quiet. His pathetic appeal seemed to touch her sympathy a little, and she said no more to upset him.

Throughout that long night he had leisure to reflect on his precarious circumstances, present and prospective, for he did not sleep at all. In the morning, Maria

remarked that he looked poorly, and said that poor dear Carney always kept a bottle of Epsom salts in his bedroom, and a tumblerful used to put him to rights when he was out of sorts. She offered to mix some for Martin, but he said he did not like salts. He had a cup of tea, and remained in bed till the boys went to school, and then he got up and began to put his accounts straight.

That night, soon after the clock struck twelve, a most hobgoblinlike howling was heard in the chimney—hideous enough to scare a man-of-war's crew. Martin lay and quaked, for he thought something wicked was coming this time, and he seemed to be struck powerless. Maria started up in a terrible fright, and fled up to her sons' attic above, from the window of which she loudly screamed for the police. Martin soon recovered presence of mind sufficient to get up and strike a light, and while doing so there was a heavy fall of a bag on to the chimney hearth, and out bounced three cats, looking as fierce as young tigers. Martin detested cats; and he knew that they would bite and scratch hard when they were infuriated, so he instantly sprang into bed again and covered his head with the clothes, while the terrified animals dashed about the room in search of an outlet. They sprang up at the window and tore down the blind, upsetting most of the fancy ware on the toilet-table, and making a noise and havoc which further alarmed Maria, who continued to shout for help, until a policeman entered the house by the back way. On opening the bedroom door the cats rushed out, and Martin was glad to be rid of them. It soon appeared clear enough to the

cool-headed policeman, that some miscreant had thrust the open-mouthed bag, with the cats in it, into the chimney-top, but they had got for awhile jammed in the flue, until they fought their way clear.

The alarm in the neighbourhood subsided in about an hour; and when Maria was sufficiently recovered to speak her mind, she again vehemently denounced Captain Chuff as the author of the diabolical trick, and in order to compose her, Martin was obliged to promise that as soon as he got better he would summons their disagreeable neighbour to the police court. I should state that the cats escaped off the premises before they could be identified, but the policeman took charge of the empty bag.

If the reader has any experimental knowledge of dyspepsia, he will understand poor Martin's state better than I can describe it. Those who do not know what dyspepsia means had better remain in ignorance as long as they can. I may simply tell them that it is a distressing malady. The receipt of a letter from Mr. Blocks' solicitor, giving notice of an action in the Supreme Court, and another letter from the new mining manager of the Tabernacle Hill Tin Company (with the startling news that the claim was almost as bare of tin as his back-yard on Surrey Hills), helped to increase Martin's harassment, and at the end of a week he was so reduced by want of sleep and loss of appetite, that his wife began to be anxious about him, and one night she urged him to send for a doctor. Then it was that Martin decided to tell her some of his troubles, and thus relieve his mind from a part of its oppressive load. He told her, as smoothly as possible, of the decline in the Wattle

Dabster shares, and she sighed. He next ventured to tell her of the temporary depression of the Northern Bullseye shares, and she gasped. But when he told her of the total failure of the Siamese Twins, she exclaimed, in a tone of anguish, "Oh, dear me ! it was only yesterday that poor Miss Ready was telling me of the loss of every farthing she had put into gold shares, and I little thought I should so soon hear of losses to myself. Oh, dear me ! Do you mean to say, then, that all my marriage settlement is lost? Four thousand three hundred pounds utterly gone from me ?"

"I trust it is not so bad as that, Maria. But do pray be calm, my love ; you see how much your excitement is distressing me. Let us hope for the best."

"It is hard enough for poor Miss Ready to lose all her income," continued Maria, beginning to cry. "But she can go to her brother in Brisbane, or she can get her own living as a governess. She has not two sons to feed and clothe and educate, and a sick husband, too. If I lose my income, whatever shall I do ? I wish there had never been a single mine ever found in the world. But I thought I was quite safe in taking your advice."

"My dear Maria, do listen to reason. You talk as if all were lost, and we were utterly ruined. That is not the case, love. Undoubtedly there is a depression in the share market just now, and I admit that some of the shares which I hold are valueless ; but others are as solid as ever. The Peak Downs, for instance, are firm at £8, and I am told they are likely to go up to £10 ; and the depression in our Northern Bullseye copper is merely temporary. The property is as valuable as ever it was.

I was told that by the legal manager himself, a few days ago ; and Rapp's shares are still saleable at a reduced figure."

"Then I tell you what to do, Martin," said Maria, sparkling up a little. " You go into town, the first thing to-morrow morning, and sell my Peak Downs at £10, or even for £9, and sell the Bullseyes and Rapps, too, for what they cost me. Then I will pay off this horrid mortgage, which is tormenting me day and night ; and the profit I make will do to pay for painting the cottage, and building a new verandah to the shop at the corner, and getting the boys some new clothes for Christmas."

Martin knew it would be useless to argue with his wife, so for the sake of a few hours' peace he appeared to acquiesce in her plan. He thought he might happily die before morning. She soon went to sleep ; but he lay awake calculating over and over again his probable income, and wishing a thousand times that he had invested his uncle's legacy in city debentures, and kept single.

The next morning, he feebly declared that he could not go into the city to transact business, if it were to save the whole community from going to wreck ; so, after a few whining remarks on the hardness of her lot, Maria said she would go and consult her cousin Philip before he went to his office. Accordingly, she went off to Mr. Drench's house before breakfast, leaving poor Martin lying in bed, with a wet towel wrapped about his head.



CHAPTER XXI.

MR. DRENCH'S REFLECTIONS ON THE MINING PANIC.



AM afraid you cannot see Philip this morning, Maria, said Mrs. Drench, after she received Mrs. M'Tailing very coolly. "The truth is, he is not fit to be spoken to by any one. I scarcely dare open my mouth before him, and the children are afraid to go near him, he is so miserably peevish. Poor things, they feel his unkindness more than I do."

"What is the matter with him, Rachel?"

"Matter! Why I believe it is the same mischief that is turning almost everybody's brains just now, and upsetting the peace of so many homes—those horrid mining speculations. When Philip was in a situation with £3 a week, I knew what I had to keep house with. We managed to pay our way, and everything went on smoothly. Philip was always good-tempered, and was punctual to all his home and his church duties, and he was a good Son of Temperance; but since he gave up his berth and took to this mining legerdemain there has been no real peace in our house. He is quite an altered

man, and there are no more signs of religious life in him than there is ticking in that broken clock on the sideboard ; not a bit more. I don't know what it will all end in, I am sure ; but I sometimes fear he will turn a complete heathen."

"Has Philip lost money, dear ?"

"I suspect so, but I don't know for certain. He has never said a sentence to me about his affairs for a month or more ; and formerly he used to tell me all he did as openly as a husband should do. Now I dare not ask him anything about his speculations, lest he should go into fits with excitement. You would not believe how much he is changed. No doubt mining is the cause of it."

Mrs. M'Tailing was just about to unbosom all her mining anxieties, for she longed to tell somebody, when there was a sharp knocking in an adjoining room, and Rachel said, "Drench is calling for me. Excuse me."

"Please to tell him I wish to speak to him for five minutes, on very particular business, will you, Rachel."

After a short absence, Mrs. Drench returned and said, "You can go in and see Philip if you like, Maria ; but you had better not tell him about your affairs if there is any worry in them, or he will surely get cross with you. He is shockingly nervous this morning."

Mr. Drench was sitting behind a writing-table, which was thickly strewn with papers. A pen lay before him, but his hands were thrust into his pockets. His untidy, haggard appearance contrasted strongly with his former sprightly bearing. He looked very unlike a true Son of Temperance, and Maria feared that he had often patron-

ized the private bar in the Mining Exchange, like many other drooping members of the mining fraternity that she had heard Martin speak of. "I am sorry to see you looking so poorly, Philip," said Maria, timidly.

"Who told you I am poorly?" snarled Drench. "There is nothing the matter with my health; I am bothered, that's all, that's all."

"I can sympathize with you, Philip, for I am just in that way myself—never was so worried before in all my life. I have come to ask your advice about selling out all my mining shares."

"Bah! selling out indeed! You should have thought of that before the bubbles began to burst. What shares have you got?"

"I have a lot of Northern Bullseyes, and ——"

"Stop a bit! I can tell you, and there is no use mincing the matter, that the Northern Bullseye Company is a complete failure. Their grand claim at Bull Flat, that they made such a shine about is not worth a bull's tail for all the copper ore it contains. The money you have invested in that concern is a dead loss; and if you hold any contributors' shares you will have more calls to pay, so make up your mind to that. Now tell me what other shares you have got."

"I have a lot of British Lions," replied Maria, trembling.

"Tush! British humbugs! They are no better than the Bullseyes. Anything else? Look sharp, I am in a hurry to get on with my accounts."

"I have 185 Rapp shares, Philip."

"What did they cost you?"

"Twenty-two shillings; and I was told they were very cheap."

"You may go and buy a thousand this morning for eighteenpence, if you want any more. Have you any other shares?"

"Yes, dear; I have 100 Peak Downs, which cost me £6. That is my heaviest investment, and I am naturally anxious about it."

"Who the mischief induced you to buy Peak Downs at that price, Maria?" shouted Mr. Drench, while he hammered the table with his fist, and looked as if he were ready to fight anybody.

"It was Mr. M'Tailing," whined Maria, beginning to cry.

"I thought as much before I asked the question. Well, M'Tailing is a swindler. You can go home and tell him I said so, if you like, or you may bring him here, and I will tell him to his face. I suppose you have had to borrow money to pay for your shares? You must have done so."

"Yes, cousin. With shame I confess to you that I have borrowed a thousand pounds on my two houses."

"Mortgaged your houses, have you? And never consulted me about it?" yelled Mr. Drench. "You will lose your houses, as sure as bricks are bricks. I pity your poor boys, that's all I can say. They have been robbed of their rights."

"Oh, Philip! pray don't speak so cruelly to me, there's a dear, good man!" said Maria, pathetically. "I know I have acted foolishly, and I am very, very sorry for it. I want you to help me to sell out every

share I have, immediately. Do help me to get my money back, and I'll take care of it."

"Pshaw ! sell out, indeed ! What nonsense you talk, Maria. You may as well try to sell rotten onions, as mining shares just now. I have an interest in not less than forty companies ; and a few months ago I valued it at £40,000—in fact, I would not have sold out for that price, cash down. This blessed morning I don't believe I could get £300 for every share I own. I am sure I could not, for buyers are now as over-shy as they were ravenously bold not long since. I am ruined, Maria. That is the shortest way of explaining my condition. Bankrupt ! I have been trying to make out my schedule for the Insolvency Court, but my brain is all adrift, and I cannot do anything. Mining has robbed me of my money, my character, and of my wits also. Tarban Creek will be my future home for life, if I don't hang myself before I get there."

"O, Philip ! pray don't talk in that dreadful way ; you frighten me. Your case is not nearly so bad as mine, for you are a clever man, and you may soon get a situation again in your old line of business, for your character is still good."

"No, it is not Maria ; or, if it is good, it looks bad, which is much the same thing from a commercial point of view. I have induced a hundred persons or more to sink their money in worthless mining concerns ; and though I can solemnly swear that I thought the companies I recommended were safe and sound, do you think they will all believe it ? Not they, indeed ! They will call me a rogue and a swindler. People smarting under losses

seldom take a fair and merciful view of things." Mr. Drench said this in a tone which showed how bitterly he felt the injustice of being suspected of wrongdoing ; but he was forgetful of the harsh way in which he had condemned poor Martin, a few minutes before, for acting in a way similar to that he himself had done.

"I think it is only right and fair for me to tell you, Philip, that Mr. M'Tailing has bought 200 Peak Downs for himself at £7 15s. since he bought the lot for me," said Maria, whose conscience began to feel a little uneasy when she reflected that Philip might perhaps discover that Martin was a Peak Downs dupe as well as herself.

"Then M'Tailing is a fool ; that's all I have to say about it. Dash it, we have all been fools!" added Drench, after a pause, during which he was scratching his head furiously. "Yes, you and I and everybody else have been fools—all except the lucky rogues who have pocketed our money, and a few wiseacres who have never meddled with mining affairs at all. I fancy I see the Devil grinning at us."

Maria gave a start, and then gazed solemnly round the room and into the chimney corner, but she did not see anything. She began to think that her poor cousin really was going crazy, but she hoped he would keep sane long enough to give her the advice she needed. Presently he said, reflectively—

"No doubt the Devil has had a merry time of it in our colony for many months past. It must have tickled him delightfully to see such a host of sapient legislators, and holy parsons, and learned doctors, and lawyers, and scribes, and schoolmasters, all forgetting their dignity and

their duties, and go grubbing in the dirt after the precious metals, when Old Nick himself knew very well there was nothing below the surface more precious than granite stones or pipeclay. And then to see the impetuous desire of everybody else in the community to go snacks with their betters in the invisible prizes ! To see tradesmen, and mechanics, and cabmen, and widows, and shopboys, and servant-girls, almost selling their souls to buy shares in the claims that had been selected by such superior intellects, and which were sworn to be rich enough to make everybody independent ! I say, if the Devil has not been delighted at all that, then never tell me again that he is the arch-instigator of foolery, humbug, bamboozle, and ruination."

Maria's harassed brain could not grasp the abstract subjects which her cousin's fervid fancy presented for her consideration : her own personal troubles were as much as her head could carry just then. During his excited rhapsody—which I have but partially reported—she sat and trembled to hear a church singer talk so freely about Satan ; and she hoped it was not wicked for her to sit there and listen. When her cousin paused to take a consoling pinch of snuff, she said, " Oh, Philip, do please tell me before I go what I shall do."

" Do ? Why, go home and keep your house tidy, and let your new husband work to maintain you. That is plain enough."

" O dear ! My husband was sick in bed when I left home. I fear I shall have to work to keep him, for he does not seem to have a bit of energy."

" Well, it is your duty to keep him if he is disabled.

Work won't hurt you, Maria, for you are strong and able; indeed, it will do you good, and you will then have less time to sit and grumble over your irremediable mishaps. Now I will say good morning to you; I must go to work at my schedule. Hump! an ugly-looking balance-sheet I shall have to show the Commissioner! But many doubtful defaulters ~~had~~ glided smoothly through his court. That is an encouraging fact for humbugs, in general. I hope I shall come out softly and clean, and then let Old Nick catch me meddling with barren mines again, if he can! Aha! I have learnt a lesson at the cost of my happiness, and I'll defy the Devil or any of his nimble agents, at the diggings or in the city, to wheedle me out of my peace of conscience if I should happily regain it."

"I hope and trust that all will end well with you, Philip. But do tell me, there's a dear man, what I am to do with my shares," said Maria imploringly. "Tell me, and then I will leave you directly."

"If you cannot sell your shares, and I doubt if you will be able to do so, for moneyed folks have grown suddenly wise, you must keep them and pay the calls on them. That's all I can say about it, if you stop here teasing me all day. Good-bye. Give my love to the boys."

Maria walked away—with her heart aching from anxiety, and vainly wishing that she were widow Carney again, and that her houses were free from that devouring mortgage. When she got home, she heard from Judith that Mr. M'Tailing had made peace with Captain Chuff, by agreeing to pay for three new line posts, to be

erected on the Chuff side of the dividing fence. That intelligence so exasperated Maria that all her monetary troubles were for awhile smothered up with wrath. She went into the yard and gave Mrs. Chuff a little of her mind—a very sharp little bit it was, too—and she told her sons all about it when they came home to dinner. They hotly sympathized with their mother.

After the reconciliation with his next-door neighbours, Martin went to spend the day in the Botanic Gardens; for he thought that fasting and fresh air might do his deranged stomach good, and the sight of the pretty, peaceful flowers would help to calm his ruffled mind. When he returned home in the evening with a keen appetite for his tea, his wife and her sons began to abuse him for his cowardly compromise with the Chuffs. A desperate quarrel ensued, but I shall not report the particulars of it, for family brawls are, to my mind, the least interesting contingencies of social life. Martin got no tea, but he got a savage beating from his wife and her two fine boys.





CHAPTER XXII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WITH his mind oppressed by care, and his body sore with bruises, Martin left home the next morning, and went by the shortest back cuts to Mr. Fagwell's office.

"Good morning, my friend ! This is an early visit, but I am glad to see you. Take a seat," said Fagwell, in his natural cheery tone, when Martin entered his private room.

"I hope I am not trespassing on your time, Fagwell ; but I have called specially to ask your advice respecting my—er—er—my two stepsons—the young Carneys."

"Aye, two promising boys, I think you told me ? Going to put them out into the world, are you ? Make men of them, eh ?"

Martin groaned, and at the same time turned his face to the light of the window.

"Wheugh ! What is the matter with your eye ?"

Martin doubled his fist, significantly, and then showed a large blue lump behind his left ear.

"Has somebody been punching you, old fellow?"

"My stepsons!" replied Martin, with emotion. "I have called to ask your advice what I shall do?"

"I'll give you advice in a twinkling," said Mr. Fagwell, with warmth. "There is a shop in King-street where they sell fancy sticks. Go there directly, and buy a supple little blackthorn, with some nice titillating knots on it, and then go home and thrash the young rogues till they promise to be good boys for ever. Stick and muscle: that is my prescription. Don't spare the rod till you have civilized the young heathens."

Martin looked as irresolute as if he were urged to go into a dark cave and muzzle two wild bears. Presently he said, "O Fagwell! I am a wretched man. My home is deplorably different from what I expected to find it. I would give my two ears to be single again."

"I am sorry to hear that sad confession, Martin. You have not been married more than a month, have you?"

"Not a month yet," sighed Martin. "O Fagwell! If you have time to spare, do hear my miserable story and give me your calm counsel. You know I would do as much for you."

"Heaven forbid that you should ever have occasion to counsel me about my conjugal disunion! Stay, you need not explain. I know what you meant, my good fellow. I do pity you from my heart, and I would not grudge my time if I could really help you. But let me warn you against disclosing your domestic troubles to any ear but your wife's. I could tell you of many homes that have been ruined by the meddling of strangers. Nevertheless, I may suggest that you take a firm stand for the

mastership of your house ; and make your unruly step-sons knuckle down to lawful authority."

" That was exactly what I was beginning to do, when the horrid row was raised. I had boxed one boy's ears for being insolent to me, and was just about to box the other boy, when my wife struck me across the small of my back with the parlour coal scoop ; and then the boys set on to me like thorough-bred mastiffs, and between the three of them I got a woeful beating. It is a mercy that I escaped without broken bones."

" Oh ! that's it, is it ? Your wife has turned on you, eh ? It is a bad case, Martin. When a mother joins with her children against her husband, there is not much chance for him, poor fellow ! He is pretty sure to get the worst of it, do what he may." Mr. Fagwell sat for a few minutes silently thinking ; presently he added, " I fear you have made an unlucky match, Martin. I cannot think of any better advice to give you than to try and make the best of your bad bargain, as hundreds of other ill-mated men are obliged to do. It would not help you at all, if you were to publish your family troubles, for you would be more likely to meet with contempt than with sympathy ; and perhaps be called a fool for not blowing up your house with gunpowder, or taking some other desperate course. Have patience, my boy ! ' What can't be cured must be endured,' as the old saw says. If you take care that you do not give cause to your wife to treat you harshly, you may reasonably hope that eventually this affliction will be for your good, in some way which I am not sufficiently wise to foresee."

Martin groaned again, and rubbed his black eye, but

he did not seem to be much comforted by his friend's sage remarks.

"Upon re-consideration, Martin," continued Mr. Fagwell, "I would advise to try soft words with your stepsons, instead of a stick; any way, soft words will be safer in your case, for the boys are more than a match for you at fighting, when backed up by their mother. And now let us change this dismal topic. I have been thinking a good deal about you lately; indeed, it was but last night that I said to my little wife, 'I wonder if our friend, M'Tailing, has any money invested in these mining bubbles that are bursting up every day?' How are you getting on with your speculations, Martin? You may tell me as much as you please about these matters, but do take my advice, my friend, and hide your domestic trials from every eye and ear outside your own house."

Martin sighed heavily and then replied, "To tell you the truth, Fagwell, my mining speculations have caused me much anxiety; and it is not unreasonable that they should do so, for I have sunk all my own money, and have induced my wife to sink all hers, and futhermore, I am in debt for shares to the extent of nearly £1,000. There is a reaction in the share market, as you are aware, and the depressing influence is widening into a general panic. I have been worried to an extent that has sometimes closely bordered upon insanity. My wife will not allow me to hope for better times, and she refuses to see any prospect brighter than absolute ruin. She is very excitable."

"It is but natural for her to feel anxious, Martin, if she has all her money invested in mining shares."

"Just so, Fagwell; but it is not wise of her to damp-

all the spirit out of me, by frequent murmuring and harsh treatment," replied Martin, while he tenderly stroked the blue lump behind his ear. "If a man is knocked stupid, you know, he is incapable of rational action. I went into the Botanic Gardens yesterday, to have a little quiet reflection on my perplexing affairs ; and when there, I met with a Rev. Joseph Dovedown, a gentleman who is in much the same position as myself, having sunk more than his all in mining claims. It cheered me very much to hear how calmly and trustfully he talked about his future prospects. He is evidently a sagacious man. It is his opinion that this mining panic is but temporary ; and that it has been produced partly through the exhaustion of hoarded capital, but mainly by the greedy devices of a few brokers and Hill End millionaires to depress the market, and then to buy up everything at their own prices."

"If that be the case, I think they may buy five hundred mines at their own price to-day, Martin. Mines are getting as cheap as old horses."

"Perhaps so. There are many unproductive mines, I grant ; but I have the consolation of feeling that I used the utmost care and circumspection in my investments, and I still think they will eventually turn out sound, so I shall hold on a bit. Mr. Dovedown is, like myself, a large holder of Northern Bullseye shares, and he seems as confident of their value as if he had actually seen seven furnaces at work in the claim, smelting out copper like wax. He says he knows the original owner of the land, and is certain that he would no more palm off a mountain of ordinary dirt for rich copper ore, than he

would knock down damaged wares with a sound warranty, or pass bad shillings. Besides, he says, and I also know it for a fact, that all the directors of that company are men of undoubted respectability, who would abhor trickery in any shape. That is only one of my ventures, I have—”

“Wait a bit, Martin. Excuse me, but let me say that the high commercial standing of directors in mining companies now-a-days is not, in every case, a sure guarantee for the value of the selections they represent. As an example, I bought a few shares in the “Jem Crow” gold mine some months ago, on the recommendation of one of the directors. He is a man whom I have known for many years as a thoroughly upright tradesman ; indeed I doubt if there is a man in Sydney this day whose reputation stands higher. If I went into his shop to buy an article, he would no more think of over-reaching me than he would of knocking me down and stealing my watch ; but the gold shares I bought from him are not worth a brass button. That is the extent of my gold speculation. Why I have not dipped deeper into the national lucky-bag is, perhaps, less owing to my superior sagacity than to my fixed determination always to stick to my own business. I mention this little circumstance to warn you from placing too much reliance on the high character of the promoters of the companies in which you have invested as a guarantee of the high value of your shares, or you may find yourself a loser by your credulity.”

“Do you mean to say, then, that they would wilfully deceive one?”

“No, certainly not. I don't want to be prosecuted

for slander. The reason why is a mystery which I leave to casuists more knowing than myself to solve ; but the fact is too apparent for anyone to deny, that men of high standing have made misstatements—or, I will softly say, miscalculations—of the value of mining claims that have been floated into companies ; and many persons have been severe losers by investing in concerns that have been utterly valueless. I am half disposed to think with poor, honest Phil Drench, the assayer (who, by the bye, is a ruined man), that all the mining directors have been befooled by the devil himself. No doubt Satan has had a good many of his prime boys at work of late, both at the diggings and in the city, and they have filled their pockets to bursting ; still, I believe that the majority of the gentlemen who have lent their names and influence to float these companies have honestly believed that the concerns were genuine, and that in launching them on the market they were doing a grand stroke at developing the resources of the colony, as well as going the right way to make themselves rich without labour. It is a wonderful infatuation, and staggers all my philosophy to analyze it."

"Yes, and it has staggered me, too. All I will say now is, that men of high standing ought to be more careful in lending their good names to bad projects," said Martin, dolefully.

"You are quite right there, my boy ; and I dare say most of them are of your opinion. Now I will not presume to advise you what to do with your shares, because I know so little about them ; but I think if I had shares just now that were saleable at any price at all, I would

sell them, and get rid of the worry and responsibility of them. By the way, Martin, may I ask, is it a fact that Blocks, the broker, is bringing an action against you for calling him a swindling rascal?"

"Yes, I fear it is true; and that is another source of worry to me. I have no money to waste in a lawsuit. I am sorry I committed myself."

"Have you seen Blocks since the quarrel took place?"

"No, I have not; but I have seen his lawyer, and he was cross."

"Take my advice, which I give you without a fee, go to Blocks at once and make up matters with him. He is not a swindler, I am sure. I dealt with him for years when he was a hatter, and I always found him fair and honest. Like many other deluded fellows, he threw up a snug, steady business to turn mining broker, and now I daresay he is sorry enough he did so. I can hardly believe that he has wilfully cheated you or anybody else, but I can conceive that he has been possessed with the mystical infatuation which is so general, and it has made him believe all that glitters is gold, or copper, or tin. I think that persons who have been engaged in floating companies, or in share-jobbing (where wilful fraud is not clear), should show a brotherly forbearance, and not throw hard epithets at one another. Go and see Blocks directly, Martin; and if you cannot persuade him to stop his action, come and tell me, and I will try what influence I have with him."

Martin thanked his kind friend for the wholesome counsel, and, after tying a handkerchief over his damaged eye, he went straightway to Mr. Blocks's office.



CHAPTER XXIII.

SOME MORE EXCITING NEWS FOR MARTIN.

 ALLOA, Mac ! are you on the sick list ? What's up with your head ? not cracked, I hope." That was Mr. Blocks's salutation when Martin entered his office, pale and excessively nervous. He was somewhat revived by the friendly looks of Blocks, and he replied,

"Yes, I certainly am poorly this morning, Blocks, and I have inflammation in my right eye. I have called here on purpose to say that I am very sorry for the offensive language I made use of to you the other day. I forgot my usual guard over my temper, and it mastered me. I ask you to kindly forgive me, and forget what I said in my anger."

"All right, old man !" said Blocks, extending his hand. "What you said did not hurt me. Don't let us say any more about it."

"You are a good fellow, Blocks. But your lawyer is going to bring an action for defamation against me, isn't he ?"

"No, no ; I'll take care of that. I was fool enough to go to him when I was in a passion, and tell him what you called me. If he were one of the peace-making sort, he would have told me to call on him next morning, when I was cool ; but lawyers must live somehow, and I suppose there is not clean, honest work enough in the community to keep them all going. There is such a squad of them now-a-days."

"You have been put to some expense in consulting your lawyer, Blocks ; so I will pay his costs, whatever they may be."

"Tut ! Not a bit of it, Mac. I'll never pay him a rap, for it was bad advice he gave me. Let him go to Bong Bong. Come and have a nobbler at the bar."

"No thank you ; it is too early for me to drink."

"Well then, sit here a minute or two while I go and get a nip. I must have something to keep up my pluck, these hard times."

Away ran Mr. Blocks to the private bar, and Martin sat in the office, feebly rejoicing that he had so easily got over one source of trouble and uneasiness. Presently Blocks returned, looking much more springy. He had evidently taken a strong nip.

"My word ! there is a jolly row in the bar !" exclaimed Blocks, rubbing his hands excitedly. "There will be a fight directly. I should have stopped to see it, but did not like to keep you waiting, Mac."

"What is the quarrel about, Blocks ?"

"O, the old thing, you know. An unlucky holder of 'Great T'umberumba shares' is slang-whanging the fellow who sold them to him seven weeks ago. There is plenty

of sport of that kind going on every day, and it helps to keep us broken-down brokers awake now we have nothing to do. But I don't care for fighting myself, and I don't see the good of kicking and nagging one another to pieces, like horses in the hold of a blazing ship," added Mr. Blocks, putting on a more philosophical air. "Quarrelling won't put spirit into the share market again. I wish it would, for then we should be all right. But we are in a precious mess, the lot of us, there is no mistake about that. All going to pot, as the saying is, and what I say is this, that it is better to grin and bear our bad luck in good humour, than to quarrel and fight over it. Wiser to laugh than to cry over mishaps, though mercy 'pon us, these are not merry times with my poor wife and children. I wish I were an honest hatter again, Mac."

Martin began to feel the cold tide of trouble swelling in his breast again. He longed to know all about the share market, but he dreaded to hear news that would bring on another prostrating attack of mental depression. Presently he asked, in a faltering tone, "Can you tell me how our Wattle Dabster claim is getting on, Blocks?"

"Yes, by jingo. I can tell you. It is a case of wind up, Martin. It is that which knocked old Dubbs over last week."

"Why, the last time but one that I saw you, Blocks, you told me you were expecting a good crushing soon."

"So I did, Mac ; and we had a crushing—not a good one, but we got nearly £200 worth of gold, which we thought was better than nothing ; but blow'd if we didn't get a letter from our mining manager, coolly telling us

that he was robbed of the whole *toto* while he was drunk. That news cooked us. The directors got in a funk, as directors often do when they ought to keep calm ; and instead of sending up a warrant for Mr. Hookey, our mining manager, they kicked up a row with me because I was close at hand. They refused to shell out any more money to pay the men on the claim, so I suppose it will be seized and sold for wages. It is a great shame. I shall lose a lot of money by it. But dash it all ! it's no good fretting. I am smashed up, whether or no ; my Rampant Lions have ruined me, and I can't help myself. It's happy-go-lucky with me now, Mac."

" But you certainly told me, Blocks, that this drunken fellow Hookey was a sober, honest man," said Martin, in a tone of remonstrance.

" Of course I did, and I believed it too, or I would not have sent him up as mining manager—never fear. He was head stoker at a steam mill in Sydney ; and was recommended to me as a back-bone teetotaller, and as honest a man as ever raked out clinkers. He did not know anything of mining, but said he was willing to learn ; so I engaged him as he was an honest man. Honesty is the best policy, you know."

" Humph ! But do you think he really was robbed of the gold, Blocks ?"

" Ah, that's the rub. He says he was robbed, and I can't swear he wasn't ; I know he did not send the gold to me. Perhaps his wife or his brother Joe picked his pocket, in a friendly way ; or he may have picked it himself, in mistake. But as you are a large shareholder, Mac, you might go up and inquire all about it—sift it to

the bottom, and get the gold if you can. None of our directors will bother themselves in the matter, for they are all busy Sydney men."

"I cannot possibly go up there. I should die on the road. You, surely, can see my unfitness for such a journey. I must say, Mr. Blocks, there has been culpable mismanagement in this company. I am sorry indeed, that I have ever had anything to do with it."

"I'll swear that, as legal manager, I have honestly done my duty in Sydney, Mac. I don't want to excuse Hookey a bit—he is a drunken humbug—but this I must say, that it is not an uncommon thing for mining managers to leave their holes and go on the spree, as you would soon observe if you took a trip to Hill End or Gulgong, or any other jolly mining town. Even honest, steady men are very apt to fall in with the prevailing custom or fashion around them, especially when they have nothing to do. 'Satan finds some mischief still'—you know the rest of it."

"But surely mining managers have plenty of work to do, Blocks?"

"Some of them have useful work to do, no doubt; but many of them are receiving their wages for doing nothing worth speaking of. I will give you just one example. The manager of a copper mine—that I know something of—got instructions to sink a shaft on the margin of a creek (as marked out by the consulting engineer, who, by the way, was a travelling dentist). A few weeks ago the legal manager, in Sydney, received a letter from the mining manager, disclosing many practical difficulties; and reporting that water had come into the

shaft and he could not keep it down. A special meeting of the directors was called, and by their instructions a telegram was sent to the mining manager, to set on men in day and night gangs, to bale out the water, until an engine and pumps could be made and sent up. The manager knew that if he demurred to that order he would be discharged, and a more obedient man put in his place. So he did—what I confess I should have done myself under the circumstances—he set men to work to bale out the water, and then he went off for a week or so prospecting on his own account, or at some other game—perhaps shooting parrots, or what not. While he was away the men were in their tents playing "all fours," which was natural enough, too, for the fellows knew it was only fool's play to bucket water out of a hole in the bed of a creek. Meanwhile the foundry men in Sydney were working over-time, making an engine and pump gear, which were of no more use on the claim than a threshing-machine would be. I could give you no end of such convincing examples, Mac ; but that one little fact will help you to judge that we Sydney men have been bamboozled right and left. No doubt the jolly fraternity of mining managers have had some merry seasons among themselves, discussing the eccentricities of their absent employers ; and many a hearty roar has been enjoyed over the letter or telegram of some innocent legal manager. Ha, ha ! What precious flats we have been, all of us ! I can't help laughing, though I am ruined out and out."

"O dear, dear me !" sighed Martin again, "how recklessly I have risked my money—my poor old uncle's

legacy ! Can you tell me, Blocks, how the Tabernacle Hill Tin Company is progressing ? ”

“ Yes I can, for I saw Mr. Brougham yesterday, and he told me all about it. You know, the directors discharged their Dutch manager. It was a mistake of theirs to hire a man who could not speak a word of English, to superintend a lot of Scotchmen and Irishmen. The new manager they sent up was a staunch, steady Yorkshireman, wide awake and straightforward. He took time to prospect every foot of the claim before he gave his opinion of it. His report came down last week, but it has not been published. He has had a cash offer for the tools and tin bags and the claim itself, all in one lot, from four men who have been fossicking about there ; and he advises the directors to take the offer before the fellows cry off.”

“ Well, I am glad to hear that news,” said Martin, and his face brightened up with a transitory gleam of hope. “ I would vote for selling the whole concern, even at a discount. How much has the new manager been offered for it ? ”

“ Twenty-five pounds,” said Blocks.

“ What ! ” vociferated Martin, furiously, as he sprang up and grasped his hat. “ There is dreadful robbery somewhere ! Our capital is £5,000 ! The bare claim itself cost £1,000 ! Twenty-five pounds ! Sell the lot for twenty-five pounds ! Pish ! Tush ! Roguery ! I'll see about it instantly ! Where is the new manager ? I'll punch his head ! ”

“ Stop, stop ! Where are you running to, Mac ? ”

“ I am going to see-er-er-Mr.-er what's his name, at

the coffee-shop, yonder. I'll tell him my mind in plain English ! I'll—I'll—I'll frighten him !"

"Here, sit down again," said Blocks, and he pulled Martin back into his chair. "Do you want to go and give another lawyer a job. The man at the coffee shop is a heavier loser than you are ; and he cannot stop the company from going smash. What's the good of blowing him up ?"

"He was one of the promoters who bought the ground. He went up and saw it, and he stated in print that the whole 100 acres were tin-bearing, and that four men could take out a ton of tin a week."

"Yes, that's true, Mac ; and I dare say four men might do as much as that, if they could only find the tin."

"But I'll make them find it. I'll—I'll—enter an action immediately ! I will have justice, Blocks," said Martin, with anxious vehemence. "Have you got one of the printed prospectuses."

"Yes, yes : there are old prospectuses of 600 companies in the corner—a cart load ; but what is the good of them ? They are mere bunkum. I never look at one of them now, though I used to glory in them a while ago. I say again to you, Mac, don't get so excited. You will gain nothing by kicking up a row. If you calmly reflect on the matter for a minute, you will see that you have cause to think yourself lucky, for the £25 will pay the new manager's wages and his passage back to Sydney, and you will be nicely clear of a losing concern. Other unhappy tin speculators, that I know, have lost their capital, and have liabilities to pay still."

After a little more of Blocks's homely reasoning, Martin got sufficiently calm to make a list of the 23 mining companies in which he had invested his capital. Blocks promised to feel through the market, and try if he could place the shares at any prices short of a ruinous sacrifice.

"Now go straightway home," added Blocks, "and let your missis coddle you up, or my word for it, the next agent you employ will be an undertaker."

Martin thanked Blocks for all his kindness, and left the office, looking as wretched as if he were going off to be shot for burning down 23 churches.





CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. BLOUGH RESOLVES TO GO TO LAW WITH THE PROMOTERS OF 29 DEFUNCT MINING COMPANIES.

CO home, and let my missis coddle me, indeed!" ejaculated Martin, as he turned with tottering steps into a back street. "No doubt poor Blocks thinks my wife is as gentle and loving as his own faithful partner. Ah me! what a difference there is in womankind! I dare not go home in this shaky condition, for I cannot defend myself; and another such a coddling as I got last night would certainly kill me. No, no, I won't go home; at any rate, I will wait till I am sure those two awful boys are in bed and asleep. O dear! I would give the world to be quiet for awhile. If I go to Blough's house I shall perhaps hear nothing but bad mining news, and I feel that I cannot bear any more of it just now: my head is as strangely bewildered as if there was a small grindstone at work in my brain. I would go to Parramatta for a few days' rest, but I am afraid my creditors might think I had bolted. O my! I wish I could bolt to Fiji!"

After a little more of such incoherent musing, Martin resolved that he would go to Blough's house, and stay there until the bed-time of his dreaded stepsons.

His sister was shocked when she opened the door for him. To her anxious questions respecting his bruised condition, he replied that he had been severely beaten by three persons ; but he evaded all her efforts to find out who were the assailants. She quickly got him some tea, and then bathed his bruises with a warm lotion, and put some pillows in the easy chair for him.

When Mr. Blough came home, about nine o'clock, his salutation to Martin was, " Hallo, old boy ! Have you been in the wars ?" But he did not ask any particulars of the wars, as Martin did not seem talkative. In ordinary seasons, Mr. Blough was not devoid of sympathy for the physical troubles of his family ; but his mind had of late been so much absorbed in mining ventures that all the tender obligations of life were lost sight of. He briefly explained to his wife that he had been consulting with his lawyer ever since dinner-time ; but he did not want any tea. He seemed in a high state of sober excitement – too much so to sit down, so he paced about the room while he expounded the new plans and projects, which he was about to carry into operation. His wife was one of those rare women who had implicit faith in all her husband's sayings and doings ; so she sat and listened with encouraging interest to his disclosures. Martin sat on the opposite side of the fireplace, feebly trying to think out his own plans for drawing all his perplexing affairs into a solvent and peaceful focus.

" Just think of my luck, Martin. Out of thirty-one

mining companies that I have gone into, twenty-nine of them are not worth that," continued Mr. Blough, and he flipped his finger and thumb to signify the nothingness of his valuation. "But never mind, I am not fretting over it, for I'll make more money out of these manœuvring promoters than I should have made if their concerns had turned out as rich as their sweet-oily prospectuses said they were. Ha, ha ! Tom Blough has not been three years a sheriff's bailiff without learning a smart move or two. Look at this list—as long as my leg—all good names, city men in first-rate positions—directors or promoters ; and here are prospectuses of their little games, to prove their liability. See, their names are given in full, and their titles as well. They will find there is no getting away from these conflicting evidences. Ha, ha ! I have got them all as tightly as a steel trap. I am going to bring actions against every man-Jack of them, and I have a lawyer of the right stamp, who will stick to me and see me righted. My word ! there will be a commotion in the city when I begin ! I shall set the law in motion, and when I have satisfactorily tested its power to redress the wrongs of mining dupes, hundreds of fellows will follow my example, no doubt, and the lawyers will have busy times for the next generation. Ha, ha ! Those shavers will be sorry they sold any of their tin-pot shares to Tom Blough, I'll bet. Now, what I want you to do for me, Martin, is this : You must lend me £300, to push on these actions with pluck. That will make £500 I shall owe you ; and I propose to give you a bond or guarantee to pay you £1,000 out of the first damages I get—just cent. per cent. for your money, you see ; and in

the meantime I will give you security over the whole of my mining scrip, and on my legal claims as well, if the scrip will not satisfy you."

Martin did not reply, simply because he had not attended to what his brother-in-law was saying. Mr. Blough assumed that his silence gave assent, so he began, with increased warmth, to expatiate on the justice of his claims and the clearness of the law on his side. To save a lengthy report of his extra-forensic arguments, I merely say that, accepting his deductions, nothing seemed to be wanting but the concurrence of the judges and juries in his own estimate of damages to make him very rich indeed. "Damages will suit me better than dividends, Martin, because they will come in in nice heavy lump sums, don't you see? And there is gratification in punishing one's enemies, you know."

"Yes, that will be nice," muttered Martin, abstractedly.

"My word! the evidence of Jack Stope will give the promoters of the Grand Whinky Fum Gold Company a sudden shock, like a quartz-stamper on their toes," continued Mr. Blough, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Jack is ready to swear, that soon after he first went up to take charge of their unopened claim, he wrote down to the proprietors, saying that there was not the colour of gold to be seen on the whole five acres; and that they might just as well sink a shaft and erect an engine on the top of Ball's Head, or Goat Island. What did Jack get for his honesty, think you? Why, he was told that his report was imperfect; that a more favourable report was wanted to help to float the claim into a company; and that if he did not choose to inspect the claim again, and

send a proper report, he was to clear out directly, and make room for a man of practical experience. Stope has got a letter to prove that helpful fact. Well, the Grand Whinky Fum Company was floated. But last week it sunk. I hold 700 shares in it, which I bought because the claim was said to be covered with rich reefs and veins. Here is the prospectus in my hand—as cramfull of lies as it can stick. There is no getting away from this plain print, even if Jack Stope's swearing should be weak. Now what damages do you think I ought to put in for in that action? Say what you think, Martin. Come, rouse up, old fellow, and speak!"

"Twenty-five pounds!" grumbled Martin, and his face looked as contorted as if he were eating green native currants. Poor fellow! he was brooding over the ruinous sale of the Tabernacle tin claim, and had not heeded Blough's arguments, or his last appeal either. But Blough did not know that, so his naturally hot temper blazed up for a minute, and he gruffly exclaimed, "You are a fool, Martin! I shall get £700 at least, for the shares were warranted worth one pound each."

"What do you mean by calling me names?" said Martin, angrily. "I won't stop here to be insulted!" He started up to depart, but his head seemed to be full of fireworks, and the next moment he fell back on his chair in a swoon. Mr. and Mrs. Blough were alarmed. A doctor was sent for, and Martin was pronounced to be suffering from brain fever. As it was not safe to take him to his home, he was carried upstairs and put to bed.

For two days Mrs. M'Tailing did not show any concern for the absence of her husband. Her sons spoke of him

in a contemptuous way, and gleefully chuckled over the banging they had given old Bristlehead ; but she did not check them. She sat and laughed when they pictured him limping about the city, with his black eye and his blue ear, and she intensely enjoyed to see them mimic his imaginary efforts to rub the sore dent of the coal scoop out of his back. But their fun was of short duration. On the third day a message came from Mrs. Blough, stating that Martin was lying dangerously ill at her house. Then, all of a sudden, it occurred to Maria that the beating had caused her husband's illness, and she and her sons began to be very uneasy. She hastened to Blough's house without delay, and her boys went to school looking unusually serious.

Mrs. Blough did not love her new sister-in-law. From a few raving sentences of Martin's, she suspected that he had received the bruises in a family brawl, so she tried to get at the fact by operating on Maria's feelings. After describing the suddenness of his seizure, three nights before, she said that when his head was shaved the doctor discovered several suspicious-looking bumps, in addition to the bruises on his eye and on his ear, and on sundry parts of his body. She added emphatically, "It is the firm belief of Mr. Blough and myself that our poor brother has been barbarously attacked by some evil disposed persons, and Blough intends to set the detectives on the track of the murderers, and have them brought to justice."

Mrs. Blough saw, by the violent agitation of Maria, that she had hit the mark, so she hit it again by expatiating on the enormity of the outrage, and the certainty

of the perpetrators being hanged, when discovered, whether Martin died or not; for it was hanging, by the law of the land, even to attempt to murder anybody.

Maria sat for half-an-hour in intense misery; and after taking a peep at her husband, as he lay in bed insensible, she returned to her home, in a state of mind which no one but a penitent murderer could describe. All her monetary and mining worries sunk out of her view, as mere trifles, and a dreadful foreboding of the extreme legal penalty, which awaited her and her sons, engrossed her thoughts and almost drove her distracted. If any woman in this world was sorry for beating her husband Maria was. The bitter remembrance of that season of remorse will ever remain, as a solemn admonition, so long as her memory lasts. In her extreme distress she went into the kitchen and tearfully implored Judith not to say a word about the quarrel she had heard in the house. She promised to buy the girl a new hat to-morrow, and gave her, on the spot, two pairs of stockings as good as new.

When the boys came home to dinner the anticipation of the gallows completely spoiled their appetites, and for half-an-hour or more they seemed paralyzed with terror. As soon as they regained sufficient composure to think of anything, they ran to a private nook of theirs in the garden, and destroyed a large collection of curious inventions, some of them of a cruel character, which they penitently confessed they had prepared for a series of nocturnal jokes on their step-father. They also confessed to having thrown the gin bottles and the cats down his bedroom flue; but they solemnly promised

their distressed mother that they would never do so any more.

Maria passed a night of dismal fears and fancies. She could not sleep a wink ; but it was not a season of peaceful reflection with her, for every approaching foot-step she heard, she thought it was a policeman coming to her door with a warrant. Her anxiety increased by nursing her fears, and her mental suffering was worse to bear than the roughest physical knocks she had ever felt. At length she resolved to ease her conscience by going to Mr. Blough, confessing her guilt, and appealing to him for mercy. She got up and waited for the first streaks of daylight, and then, despite the wailing protests of her sons, away she went and knocked up Mr. Blough and his wife.

I refrain from giving details of the exciting interview. Maria confessed all her conjugal faults and expressed her deep sorrow for them, and she vowed perpetual amendment. Mr. Blough was as inflexible as a judge. "Public duty stood before friendship," he said. But by and bye, he yielded to the persuasion of his wife, and the tearful beseechings of Maria, inasmuch as he promised to await the issue of Martin's illness, before he reported the case to the police authorities.

Maria again returned to her home, somewhat relieved, but not comforted. She knew that her husband's life was hanging by a mere thread, and that if the thread were to break she believed her doom would be a felon's death, and her sons' young lives would be ended in the same horribly disgraceful way ; so she and her sons began to pray to God to spare Martin's life. They prayed in a

way that only those persons pray who feel the urgent need of the mercies supplicated for. Maria knew the way to pray, but she had not practised it for a year or two. It was a fresh start off in the right way for herself and her sons. Nor was it a single appeal merely ; it was repeated from day to day and from week to week, while Martin lay in the same precarious state ; and when at the end of seven weeks, the doctor pronounced him to be out of danger, their mouths were filled with praise and thanksgiving. The effect of all these pious exercises was apparent in Maria ; not only in the placidity of her temper in her home, but in her more devout attendance on Church services. Her good pastor was delighted. But the influence was even more strikingly manifest in her sons, especially in their improved demeanour at Church, and in the Sunday-school. Their teacher said they had become the quietest boys in his class ; and Judith declared to Mrs. Drench, that if she had not witnessed it she could not have believed it possible for such a change to come over two boys in a few weeks. It was therefore clear, that when they were praying for poor sick Martin they also prayed for themselves, with happy results.

As soon as Martin's consciousness returned, his wife visited him every day, and her tender interest in him quite won his heart again. There is nothing so effective as kindness in winning back estranged hearts. The boys also went to see him, and in humble terms expressed their sorrow for their past misconduct, and they promised, if Martin would forgive them, that he should never again have occasion to complain of them ; and they went home

again fully resolved to be good boys until they grew into good men.

Maria's devout example had a happy influence on her susceptible husband. During his season of convalescence he occupied much of the time in studying the Bible, and in prayer; and after a time his mind became wondrously calm and peaceful, and he could think over the complicated monetary troubles, which he knew were before him, with far more composure than lion-hearted Buonaparte could plan a battle.

Prayer yields comfort and power. However much of fiction I have written, the foregoing proposition is a mighty fact, and I wish that all mining victims and everybody else would test it.





CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

MARTIN'S doctor was as kind as he was skilful ; he knew how to "minister to a mind diseased" as well as how to cure a fever. From his knowledge of the antecedents of his patient, he judged that the cause of his ailment was excessive mental excitement. He had noticed the bruises on Martin's ear and eye, but did not attach much significance to them ; and he was not responsible for the diagnosis which Mr. and Mrs. Blough gave to their terror-stricken sister-in-law. As Martin slowly recovered, the doctor advised that he should not be spoken to about his late mining speculations, nor upon any other exciting topic. When he was strong enough to travel he was sent to a healthy part of the country, to the farmhouse of a homely old couple, who nursed him as tenderly as if he were their own son. He stayed with them about ten weeks, and then returned to Sydney with his body and mind braced up to meet his difficulties.

It would fill many chapters were I to give a detailed account of his complicated affairs ; but I must wind

them up as summarily as possible. He found that of all the mining companies that he had invested in, the Peak Downs shares were the only ones that had a saleable quotation in the market, and the price of them had fallen from pounds to shillings. The wonderful dividend accruing from his own and his wife's Peak Downs had been absorbed in paying calls on other shares, to avoid District Court writs. Mr. Blocks had been unsuccessful in his efforts to sell Martin's shares : but he had given Mrs. M'Tailing all the assistance he could during her husband's absence. Martin was not long in deciding that the only course he could honestly take was to place his estate in the Insolvency Court, for legal process was going on for recovery of his overdue promissory note, and other debts, which he was totally unable to pay.

His passage through the Court was mild ; for it was plainly to be seen that all his doings had been straightforward and honest. He had no opposing creditor, and his furniture and apparel were allowed him.

His wife helped him to bear his troubles like a true woman. She certainly did sigh when she got notice to leave her house, and she sighed again when both her houses were sold by the mortgagee, but she never uttered a grumbling word in Martin's hearing, and her patient bearing cheered him wonderfully. The boys, also, behaved like brave little gentlemen. Davy once forgot his good manners for a minute, and punched Captain Chuff's son Dick on the nose, for calling him a pauper ; but Dick deserved a punching for his insolence. Barring that little spurt both Davy and Saul were as good as an average of the best of boys.

With his wife's concurrence, Martin took a little cottage at Waterloo. They had more furniture than their new home would hold, so they sold the surplus chattels, and with part of the money Maria bought a sewing-machine. A friendly miller gave her a contract to make flour bags, by way of practice ; so she has plenty of useful employment at present, and she hopes that when she has acquired skill in working the machine, she may get some finer work than flour bags. With the balance of money received for furniture, and by the sale of his watch and jewellery, Martin raised capital enough to buy two handy baskets, and a small stock of stationery and useful books ; he also took out a hawker's license. It was a rather humble beginning, but he was too nervous for a schoolmaster, and his hand was too shaky for a clerk's duties, if either of those posts had been offered to him.

He has been several months engaged in his new calling, and it is beginning to pay pretty well. He is hoping that he may soon be able to add to his wares sufficiently to stock a stall at Paddy's Market on Saturday nights ; and who knows but, by and bye, he may have a big shop in George-street? Many men who occupy big shops began in as small a way as Martin did. He found the baskets rather troublesome to carry at first, and they galled his arms and his hips ; but his thoughtful wife has nicely padded the handles and sides of the baskets, and he gets along more comfortably now. In the course of his daily trudging through the city and suburbs he falls in with many persons who have lost all their little savings in mining speculations ; and he makes it a part of his business to explain to them, in simple, intelligible terms,

how he was enabled cheerfully to bear up against his heavy losses and crosses, and what it is that makes him now far more happy, as a poor itinerant peddler, than he was when he had thousands of pounds in the bank. It would do anyone, perhaps, more good than a dull sermon to look at his pleasant face, when he is telling the story of his joyful release from the burden of a troubled conscience.

Martin and his wife now agree like doves. Their mutual compact, to forgive and forget all past disagreements, and to live and love together, has never been infringed. If they ever speak of their mining disasters, it is but to express their joy that they got out of them so soon, and that they have escaped the odium which attaches to the reputation of some of their speculating neighbours. They are making a comfortable living, honestly, and are contented and happy, and they are trying to be useful to the sick poor around them. In his hours of quiet reflection, Martin has more than once reviewed his late experience ; and he can clearly see that the beating which gave him so much pain and vexation, was a lucky infliction after all ; for to it he can indirectly trace his present free and happy condition. I dare say many poor, miserable sinners would be willing to purchase such happiness at similar cost ; indeed, I know several unlucky benedicts in this land, who would joyfully undergo half-a-dozen such beatings as Martin got, if they could thereby insure as much love and comfort in their homes as Martin has in his humble wooden cottage.

Mr. Drench also went into the Insolvent Court ; and after a prolonged purging he came out cleared from all

his liabilities. He then began to write a pamphlet, to show the nature of his connexion with sundry bubble companies, and to prove his perfect innocence of any complicity in roguery. No amount of persuasion, from experienced pamphleteers or others, could turn him from his purpose ; and he would perhaps have wasted three months or more in writing a long rigmarole, which nobody would take the trouble to read—when, as luck would have it, one of the salesmen at Messrs. Glauber and Co., the chemists, went mad about his mining losses ; so his berth was vacant. Drench applied for it and was engaged, at a salary of £4 a-week. He is now determined, instead of illuminating his character with pen and ink, to take the more sensible course of showing its goodness, by his “godly, righteous, and sober life.” To that end he has offered himself again as a worker in the Sunday school connected with his church, and he has been re-admitted to the rear ranks of the Sons of Temperance.

Mrs. Drench is quite a new woman—as happy as the days are long. She said in a merry tone to Maria, the other day, that if any mining trickster should enter her house again, to tempt her reformed husband to buy or sell shares, she would trundle a wet mop about his ears, or empty the hot tea kettle over his boots, and make him march out faster than he came in. Maria smiled, and said it would be serving him rightly.

Poor Mr. Blocks has gone back, as a journeyman hatter, to the shop where he was formerly master : but he does not let the change wound his pride or depress his spirits. He owes a large amount of mining debts,

but he cannot spare time to go through the Court to pay them. All the valuables he has in the world are his good wife and six children. He is not afraid of his creditors seizing them. He is working for his family, like a plucky man, and he does not stop to bother his head about by-gone matters that cannot be mended. A customer tauntingly reminded him the other day that he was a humbugging share-broker ; but he merely winked pleasantly, and said that he should not have far to run to find his match. He was quite right there.

Mr. Blough's schemes for getting rich by going to law are all blighted. While he was getting ready to be early in the field of action, his hopes were nipped in the bud by the adverse verdict of a Supreme Court jury, on a mining case, in every feature similar to the cases that Mr. Blough and his counsel were preparing for trial, and which they consequently abandoned. It is the opinion of some sharp lawyers, and other pushing colonists, that both Judge and jury were wrong in their decision on that important experimental suit. But I am sure that the majority of sober thinking folks in the land believe that the Judge and the jury were right—at any rate, their conclusion has had the happy effect of stopping a torrent of expensive litigation, and doubtless of covering a multitude of sins. Children, yet unborn, will by and bye, be much obliged to those gentlemen for their sensible verdict.

But Mr. Blough was sorely vexed at that verdict, and so were many other persons, who were hunting the same game that he was. He now loudly condemns the duplicity of the promoters of the bubbles, on which he

had hoped to float to fortune; but he almost as crossly condemns himself for not selling out all the scrip he had when he could have cleared £30,000 or more. Thus it is plain, that he is less concerned at being a holder of valueless shares than he is at his inability to palm them off to some bigger fool than himself. That is the way of gamblers and smashers, all the world over. Unlucky Mr. Blough has lost all his ready money, and some money besides, which was not ready until he gave security for it over his household furniture, and his life assurance policy. He will have to forfeit his furniture and his policy also. He feels it is hard, no doubt, but other mining operators are in perhaps harder straits, who think it is their best policy to be silent on the subject.

When I was at Saint Helena, years ago, I was shown marks of an immense tidal wave, which swamped many ships in the anchorage, and broke on to the shore with overwhelming fury, doing much mischief to some parts of James Town. It was described to me as a wave of unprecedented magnitude, and was doubtless caused by some submarine convulsion of nature. I have been reminded of that phenomenon when reflecting on the waves of speculation which have recently swept over our community, swamping many households, and filling unnumbered hearts with trouble. I dare say some marks of the disastrous effects of those figurative waves will be traceable years hence, and will be seen further inland than the marks of the surges on Saint Helena's shores.

Mr. M'Tailing's case is but one of a hundred, or perhaps of a thousand which could be detailed, if every loser would speak out his experience. Many persons

will, perhaps, as long as they live, remember how lightly they parted with their means of independence ; and they will have leisure to reflect on their folly as they struggle along on the rugged side of life's highway. It makes a touching difference to a weakly man, up in years, whether he has a settled income—small though it be—or no income at all, save what he may earn by his own feeble hands. Mr. M'Tailing sank his pounds in barren mines, and he now finds it wearisome, trudging work to gather in pence enough to supply his daily necessities. Many others are in a similar case.

It is, however, a noticeable feature of this unprecedented visitation, that folks, in general, are not very lachrymose over their disasters. Where I have met with one unlucky speculator, who was ready to weep over his mining experience, I have met with a dozen who were more disposed to laugh at their losses. Perhaps their wives and children are not so jubilant, if one could see into their poverty-stricken homes.

It seemed rather curious to me when I, the other day, heard a man tell, as if it were a funny joke, how that he had lost all the money which he and his wife had been for years saving up to build a little cottage. Perhaps it is because losers are so numerous that each one feels his own case less. There is a wonderful influence in companionship, even in misery. I would not stop any one from taking all the comfort he can get from such a source, but I recommend Mr. M'Tailing's plan as a better one.

Those turbulent waves of speculation have subsided. Let us hope that the deposit of experience will make us

all richer in practical wisdom. I am by no means sanguine that such rushing waves will not visit us again; but I think if they do come we shall all show a little more cool judgment and common sense in facing them. I should not like to guarantee that every losing man I know would not have another "go in at it," if the mining rage were to break out afresh; but I will confidently speak for one unlucky old man whom I know a little of: he will never again speculate in mining shares, if he does not grow silly.

Perhaps the barren holes and tunnels that have been made in various parts of the country at a large cost (and which so many well-paid miners have laughed over), may serve as useful landmarks or beacons in forthcoming days, as old wrecks on the reefs in Torres Straits, serve to guide modern navigators. That there will be extensive mining operations in the future, no reasonable man can doubt; and that there is infinitely more mineral wealth in the land than has yet been developed, must be admitted; but it will have to be got out by intelligent, rational effort, and the judicious employment of capital; not by excited simpletons scratching for it, like a host of school children scrambling for *bon-bons*, or like larrikins grubbing for bones in a rubbish heap.

If the proprietors of the Australian Steam Navigation Company were to elect men as directors of their affairs, who were lacking in the essential experience of business tactics; or if they appointed a dancing-master for their general manager, and gave the command of their fine fleet of steamers to fiddlers, with tight-rope dancers for engineers, it would not be a wonder if that flourishing

concern were soon in the winding-up condition of the Wattle Dabster Gold Company, with Mr. Block's honest stoker as mining manager. Some of the managers of our late mining companies were competent men, no doubt; but it is a glaring fact, which nobody can deny, that in many instances, the managers appointed to conduct mining operations, were as incompetent for their duties as a professional fiddler would be to command a steamship, and as a dancing-girl to superintend the engine-room of it.

A late exalted judicial authority aptly defined a mining promoter as "a man who has a first-rate thing, and is most anxious to part with it." Generous hearted fellows those promoters were, as a class, no doubt! Some, whom I knew, were indefatigably pushing with the first-rate things they possessed. Many poor widows and others they have sought to enrich. But I, for one, am willing to "let bygones be bygones," and pocket my losses quietly. I hope that, in future, promoters may reflect that they will best promote their own honour and the credit of the land they live in, if they refuse to lend the weight and influence of their names to promote doubtful schemes, which may bring disaster or ruin upon their confiding neighbours.

THE END.

6

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